

June  
2014

# ANIMATION MAGAZINE

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Animating the  
Universe for  
Fox's *Cosmos*:  
A Spacetime  
Odyssey

Annual Feature  
Film Guide!  
Licensing Expo!  
The Story  
of Brazilian  
Animation!

+

The VFX of  
Maleficent,  
Godzilla and  
X-Men!

Building an Epic:  
DreamWorks'  
How to Train  
Your Dragon 2

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## Log On & Toon Up!

Our giveaway for this month is the Oscar-nominated *Ernest & Celestine* on Blu-ray, courtesy of New Video Group, available June 17.

Visit

[www.animationmagazine.net](http://www.animationmagazine.net) to win!

**Cover:** DreamWorks' *How to Train Your Dragon 2* is featured on our main cover; the Annecy Edition features Zagtoon's *Zorro: The Chronicles*; and the Licensing Edition spotlights Cyber Group Studios' *Ladybug*.



## Welcome back!

**I**t's summer here in animation land, and that means it's blockbuster movie time. This month, we have a look into DreamWorks' much-anticipated *How to Train Your Dragon 2*. Using some amazing new technology called Apollo, our pals in Glendale have really raised the bar for themselves on this one, and we're sure you'll enjoy our behind-the-scenes look at this flick just before it hits theaters on June 13.

We've also got a lot of great visual-effects movies covered in this issue. Obviously, *X-Men: Days of Future Past* is very high on my list of must-see movies since I wrote the book on the original trilogy. (Check out *Mutant Cinema: The X-Men Trilogy from Comics to Screen* at [www.sequart.org](http://www.sequart.org) if you need a refresher on this ever-changing franchise.) We've also a great look at everyone's favorite city-stomping monster *Godzilla* from Bill Desowitz, and a peak at how they made Angelina Jolie scary for *Maleficent*.

The piece I am perhaps most proud of in this issue is our three-page look at the animation of *Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey*. I've been a fan of the original since I was a kid and as an adult got to meet Carl Sagan very briefly once. But it all paled to sitting down with Kara Vallow and her crew for a marathon discussion of how they came up with the striking animated segments for the new edition of *Cosmos*. If you haven't seen it, be sure to catch an episode of the Fox series before it ends its run.

And summer is also a great time to travel, and we have plenty of international news this issue. The documentary *Between Frames: The Art of Brazilian Animation* is a must-see film making festival rounds that tells a story about the familiar love of animation we all feel in an exotic land. We also take a peek at the upcoming Annecy festival, one of our favorites; look back at Cartoons on the Bay; head to Russia for a look at the burgeoning animation industry there; and then celebrate the centennial of animation in Finland. Who needs to travel?

There's more, but I think I'll let you discover it for yourselves.

As I mentioned last month, I'm still kind of new to this job and am anxious to hear from you – good or bad – what you think of this issue. We want to make our readers happy, so if there's something you want to see covered in the magazine or on our website – or even if you just want to chat about your favorite toon – drop me a line at [tom@animationmagazine.net](mailto:tom@animationmagazine.net).

Until next time.

P.S.: Summer is also internship time, and we're looking for an editorial intern who is both interested in animation and in the journalistic process of assembling and publishing a magazine. If that's you, send a resume and no more than three clips or writing samples to [tom@animationmagazine.net](mailto:tom@animationmagazine.net).

Tom McLean  
Editor  
[tom@animationmagazine.net](mailto:tom@animationmagazine.net)

## QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"Most animated movies are light. We wanted to make something serious but not preachy. And not necessarily religious either – this will be for religious people and atheists, because they're subjects that affect everybody."

– Salma Hayek, about the animated film she is producing, *Kahlil Gibran's The Prophet*



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# Kitty is Not a Cat!

A MUSICAL SERIES ABOUT A LITTLE KID WHO WANTS TO BE A CAT  
AND THE CATS WHO SHOW HER HOW TO BE A LITTLE KID

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**FEATURES****L.A. Animation Jobs Hit All Time High**

**May 13:** According to data collected by The Animation Guild, animation work in Southern California hit an all-time high last year and shows no signs of slowing down.

IATSE Local 839's data shows that more than 3,350 people were employed in its jurisdiction last year. Guild organizer Steve Kaplan pointed out to *Deadline.com* that about half of this work was on animated features, which also hit all time highs in 2013 thanks to the smashing performance of *Frozen*, *Despicable Me 2*, *Monsters University* and *The Croods*.

Said Local 839 rep Steve Hulett: "We're in an upward jobs spiral. ... As more animation product is created that makes money and profits, more producers want to get into the act, and producers already in are increasing the amount of work they're doing, so you have more work created and more employment."

Hulett pointed out that TV animation jobs are also on the rise, with growth building from the preproduction side — gigs like storyboarding, layouts, scripts, character and background design.

**FESTS AND EVENTS****13-Year-Old Wins Short Animation Contest Co-Sponsored by Aardman**

**April 29:** A teen from the large English town of Milton Keynes will get to see her stop-motion animated short air across the nation after winning a filmmaking competition co-presented by Aardman Animations.

Tia Margan, 13, came out on top of the competition, which launched last month and challenged young animators ages seven to 15 to produce a short starring Aardman's iconic Morph claymation figure, using the software Animate It! After making it to the final four after judges reviewed the entries and 24 hours of public voting, Margan's *Mad Morph Tea Party* was the clear winner with 287 votes.

**FIRST LOOK AT DISNEY AND MARVEL'S 'BIG HERO 6'**

Disney released May 20 the first stills from *Big Hero 6*, its upcoming Marvel-

**PEOPLE****WB Animation's Sam Register Promoted; Adds Digital Content Role**

**April 23:** Sam Register has been promoted to the newly created position of president of Warner Bros. Animation and Warner Digital Series.

Register will head up a newly formed live-action digital content production unit and will now be responsible for spearheading the development and production of original live-action digital series. Register also will continue to run Warner Bros. Animation, having served for the previous six years as its executive VP creative affairs.

**FEATURES****Moonbot to Adapt 'Olivia Kidney' as a Hybrid Feature Film**

**April 14:** Moonbot Studios has acquired the film rights to adapt the *Olivia Kidney* trilogy of young adult books by award-winning author Ellen Potter into a series of live-action films with significant animation sequences.

Moonbot is an Oscar-winning studio based in Shreveport, La., and is co-founded by William Joyce, Brandon Oldenburg and Lampton Enochs. It also recently acquired film rights to *The Extincts* by Veronica Cossanteli, published by Chicken House Entertainment.

**FEATURES****'Star Wars: Episode VII' Cast of Originals, Newcomers Confirmed**

**April 29:** Disney and Lucasfilm officially announced the cast for the upcoming *Star Wars: Episode VII*, including the return of several major cast members from the original trilogy.

Reprising their roles are Mark Hamill as Luke Skywalker, Harrison Ford as Han Solo, Carrie Fisher as Princess Leia, Peter Mayhew as Chewbacca and Anthony Daniels as C-3PO and Kenny Baker as R2-D2.

New additions to the cast are John Boyega, Daisy Ridley, Adam Driver, Oscar Isaac, Andy Serkis, Domhnall Gleeson and Max von Sydow. No word was released as to the characters they will play.

## FEATURES

### London-based Double Negative Adds Feature Animation Division

**April 13:** London-based VFX house Double Negative has launched a new animation division to produce CG feature films under the direction of former DreamWorks Animation associate producer Tom Jacomb. The new division plans to create an integrated front-end and back-end pipeline to work in tandem with IP creators and filmmakers in the creation of high end animated features.

## INTERNET

### Amazon Agrees to Acquire Dominant Digital Comics Distributor comiXology

**April 10:** E-tail giant Amazon has reached an agreement to acquire leading North American digital comics distributor comiXology. The deal is expected to close in the second quarter of this year. Terms of the acquisition were not disclosed in the official press release.

ComiXology was founded in 2007 and currently offers a digital comic-book library of content from over 75 top publishers, as well as independent creators. The company will retain its New York headquarters after the acquisition; comiXology also has offices in Los Angeles and Paris.

## FESTS AND EVENTS

### Student Oscars Winners Announced

**May 16:** The three winning animated films in the 2014 Student Academy Awards have been announced:

- *Higher Sky*, Teng Cheng, University of Southern California
- *Owned*, Daniel Clark and Wesley Tippetts, BYU, Utah
- *Yamashita*, Hayley Foster, Loyola Marymount University, California

The filmmakers of the three winning animated films – plus the winners in four other categories – will be brought to Los Angeles for a week of activities culminating in an awards ceremony June 7 at the DGA Theater in Hollywood. At the ceremony, the placement of each film will be announced: gold, silver or bronze.

## Passings

Swiss surrealist artist **H.R. Giger**, died May 12 at age 74 Monday after being hospitalized for a fall down the stairs in his Zurich home. He is well known as the designer of Ridley Scott's sci-fi masterpiece *Alien*, for which he won a visual-effects Oscar in 1980.

**Efrem Zimbalist Jr.**, who provided the voice of Alfred in the classic *Batman: The Animated Series* and other Batman-related toons, died May 2 at his ranch in Solvang, Calif., at age 95.

## TV

### 'Breadwinners' Gets Second Season

**May 8:** Nickelodeon will be baking up a second season of its popular new animated comedy *Breadwinners* from creators Steve Borst and Gary "Doodles" Di Raffaele. The 20-episode order will continue the adventures of feathered friends SwaySway and Buhdeuce as they explore the world of Pondgea, dodge frightful foes, discover magical new breads and meet more crazy customers.

*Breadwinners* has proven a hit for the channel, ranking No. 1 in its Saturday 11 a.m. time slot with kids 2-11/6-11 and boys 2-11/6-11. The show will make its debut on international Nick channels this fall.

## FEATURES

### WB Extends Animation Slate to 2018

**May 7:** Warner Bros., buoyed by the box office smash hit *The LEGO Movie*, has announced plans to up its animated features game, with two as-yet untitled 3-D projects now slated for Feb. 10, 2017, and Feb. 9, 2018.

While Warner has not confirmed details of the 2017 and 2018 releases, last year the Animation Group revealed it was developing a couple of feature projects. The first, *Storks*, would have a script by Stoller and be directed by Doug Sweetland, who helmed the Pixar short *Presto*. The second, *Smallfoot*, is to be written by Requa and Ricarra from an original idea by director Sergio Pablos (*Despicable Me*). When these projects were announced in January 2013, the films were tentatively scheduled for 2015 and 2016, respectively.

## TV

### Disney's 'Frozen' Coming to Live Action for ABC's 'Once Upon a Time' series

**May 12:** ABC Television's fairy tale drama *Once Upon a Time* will be welcoming a new Disney princess into its live-action (and a bit more badass) menagerie. A hint at the show's fourth season (beginning Fall 2014 on ABC) seen in the season 3 finale shows a tall blonde in blue materializing from some magical ooze, leaving a trail of frost in her wake. And just in case you missed it, the show's official Twitter account made it perfectly clear: "#Frozen is coming to #OnceUponATime."

## GAMING

### TinyCo. Animates Immersive 'Family Guy' Mobile Game

**April 10:** TinyCo. launches the mobile game *Family Guy: The Quest for Stuff* on the Apple App Store and Google Play, bringing not just an animated property to those platforms but innovative uses of animation.



The game allows users to play as multiple characters in the *Family Guy* universe on quests both large and small. Starting out slowly, the game expands to encompass the entirety of Quahog and allows players to control and play with just about every regular and recurring character on the show.

Andrew Green, head of business development and business operations for game producer TinyCo., says there's about three months' worth of content available to play, with new content and features set to be added on a regular schedule.

Green says TinyCo. collaborated closely with Fuzzy Door Production, which produces the hit animated series for Fox. They helped create an original animated opening sequence including original voice over work from the show's cast.

The game was written by the show's writing staff, Green says, a move that lets TinyCo. focus on the game play aspects and exploiting the already-rich world of the show.

The game is free to play, with in-app purchases available – but not required, Green says – to speed up advancement through the game.

TinyCo. used a group of about six animators plus a lead to create all the animations for the game, including walk cycles, turns, duels and multiple skins for the characters.

"We had to build everything from scratch making sure it was on model using our tools and our processes internally," says Green.

"It's tons of work, but that's what we needed for the brand. It feels like *Family Guy*, and that's really the No. 1 thing."



# Books We Love

## Magic Color Flair: The World of Mary Blair

By John Canemaker

[Walt Disney Family Foundation Press, \$40]

**I**conic Disney artist Mary Blair (1911-1978) is one of the most notable illustrators of the 20th century, not to mention a hero of women in animation. With this new collection of historic photos and lush reprints of Blair's designs (which helped shape the look of *Alice in Wonderland*, *Cinderella* and *Peter Pan*), award-winning animator John Canemaker celebrates the artist's whimsical, energetic work.

Assembled to complement this year's exhibition at The Walt Disney Family Museum in San Francisco, the 172-page volume offers a glimpse at the evolution of Blair's distinctive style, from her student paintings created at the Chouinard Art Institute, to her work for Disney and the Little Golden Books, to rarely seen advertisements, fashion designs and installations she created later in life. *Magic* is a fine addendum to *The Art and Flair of Mary Blair* and a worthwhile volume in its own right.

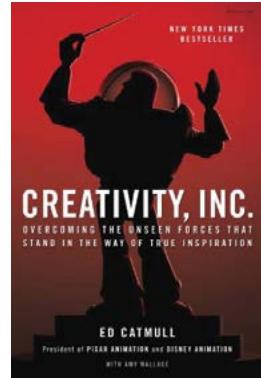


## Creativity, Inc.: Overcoming the Unseen Forces That Stand in the Way of True Inspiration

By Ed Catmull, with Amy Wallace

[Random House, \$28]

If you're looking for a guiding light on your studio's journey, you could do worse than turn to Pixar co-founder and current Disney-Pixar president Ed Catmull. Written for managers looking to inspire their teams to new creative heights, Catmull has created a manual for those striving for originality, handing you the keys to create working environments that allow inventiveness and talent to shine. Delving into the nerve center of Pixar – into the meetings, postmortems and brain-trust sessions where some of the world's most successful films are fine-tuned – Catmull leads you by example toward the clearest path to fostering a creative culture. The perfect book to "accidentally" leave in the executive bathroom, really.



## The Art of How to Train Your Dragon 2

By Linda Sunshine

[Newmarket Press, \$45]

You already know that DreamWorks' upcoming sequel to its hugely popular CG adaptation of Cressida Cowell's dragon-riding world will involve high-flying feats, strange new lands, even stranger dragons and plenty of scaly situations. Now, just imagine how many incredible ideas, designs, creatures and locations the team dreamed up that never made it to the screen. With more than 300 paintings, drawings, sketches, models, stills, studies and storyboards to pore over, Sunshine's definitive guide will take you on an artistic journey behind the scenes, from the ice caves of Berk to the fantastical flights of Hiccup and Toothless. An introduction by writer/director Dean DeBlois and foreword by Gerard Butler, the voice of Viking chief Stoick, don't hurt either.

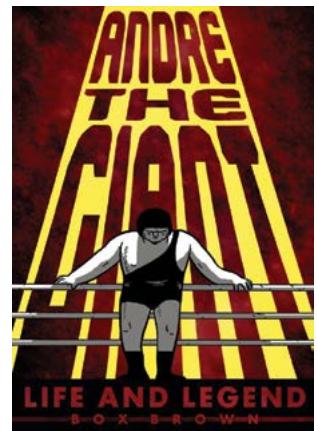


## Andre the Giant: Life and Legend

By Box Brown

[First Second, \$18]

If you had to pick a persona who truly epitomized the cliche "larger than life," chances are you would land on Andre Roussimoff – better known by his stage monicker: Andre the Giant. Best known from his pro-wrestling career and his role as the lovable giant in *The Princess Bride*, Andre was a normal guy whose life became extraordinary because of his physical massiveness (at his peak, he carried 500 pounds on his nearly seven-and-a-half-foot frame), which ultimately was also his undoing. In this painstakingly researched graphic biography, Ignatz Award-winning comic artist and wrestling fan Box Brown pares this larger than life character down with a mix of historical records, anecdotes from his colleagues and explorations of The Giant's career.



– Mercedes Milligan

# Writing on the Edge

*Robot Chicken* lead animators find success in the book world with *The Foundry's Edge*, the first part of a new young-adult novel trilogy. By Tom McLean.

**W**riting has long been a pursuit many must undertake in their time away from the day job that pays the bills. But in the case of Cam Baity and Benny Zelkowicz, that day job was working as lead animators on the hit Adult Swim series *Robot Chicken*.

Like that show, the result is as remarkable and unexpected as you can get. The pair have written a novel called *The Foundry's Edge: The First Book of Ore*, the lead-off in a trilogy of young-adult fantasy novels published this spring by Disney-Hyperion.

The series is set on a world where all technology is created by a monopolistic corporation called The Foundry, whose chief surveyor is abducted, forcing his daughter to face the truth about the company's plundering of a world of living metal for its riches. The book has so far garnered strong reviews from the likes of *Publisher's Weekly*, *Kirkus* and *Booklist*, which said it belongs "in the same stack as *Harry Potter* and *Percy Jackson*."

But Baity and Zelkowicz are not quitting their day jobs on *Robot Chicken* – they plan to write during the show's hiatus – and they are working now on the second novel.

Baity says much of the inspiration for the idea, which began as a movie pitch back in 2006, came from both their experience as stop-motion animators and their love of such epic book series as *The Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter* and Phillip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy.

"Being stop-motion animators, we spend so much time with essentially pieces of junk, like foam and wire and just objects. And part of our job is to give it life, so it kind of came naturally from that," he says. "And then it just got really dark and we found ourselves going down into this world and just building it out."

After several attempts to turn the idea into a movie pitch and still finding it diffi-



cult to include all their ideas, they started just writing it out and ended up attracting the interest of editor Kevin Lewis at Disney-Hyperion, who asked for a trilogy.

Writing the book was liberating, Zelkowicz says. "We sat down to write that first thing, and there were no limitations on the content – it was just write it the way you see it, write what feels right, and makes you laugh and makes you scared and excited."

It also provides a completely different creative experience from stop-motion animation.

Benny Zelkowicz



Cam Baity



"Writing is such an isolating process," says Baity. "So when we get to animate, we're around other people who are happy; we get to burn ourselves on hot glue and get splinters. We get those back pains that are so great. But it's so nice to have a balance of that, because once you're tired of that and tired of burning yourself, you can go sit down in front of the computer and put the headphones on and just isolate yourself. So I think we so far have struck a pretty good balance between the two."

Zelkowicz says the warm welcome they've received from the book-publishing world is a welcome similarity to their experience working in animation.

"People are really supportive that you've got a book coming out, what can I do to get the word out, and just it's really nice to be plugged into that," he says. "So now that we have two nice communities to go between is really, it's a joy." ♦

# June Planner

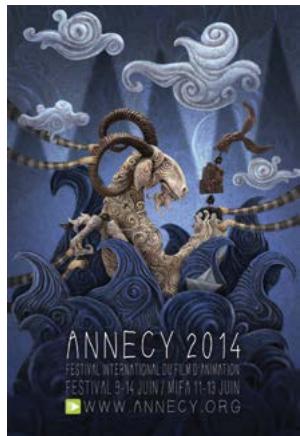
2

Groundbreaking silhouette animator **Lotte Reiniger** was born on this day in 1899.



9-14

The creme of European animation will be on display at the **Annecy Int'l Animation Film Festival** in France. ([annecy.org](http://annecy.org))



**10-12** Pack some earplugs and remember to stay hydrated if you're in L.A. for the razzle-dazzle of **E3**. ([e3expo.com](http://e3expo.com))

Or stay home with new DVDs *Aaah!!! Real Monsters - The Final Season Set*, *Transformers: Animated - The Complete Series* and *Cosmos: A SpaceTime Odyssey*.



**13** DreamWorks' hotly anticipated sequel *How to Train Your Dragon 2*, directed by Dean DeBlois, soars into theaters today.

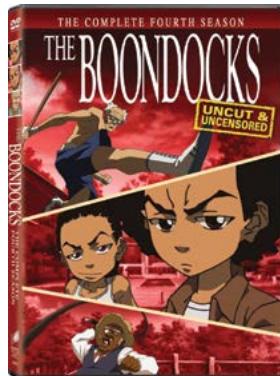
The **Toronto Animation Arts Festival International**, featuring workshops, screenings and more, runs through June 16. ([taafi.com](http://taafi.com))

**taafi**  
TORONTO ANIMATION ARTS FESTIVAL INTERNATIONAL



**17** GKIDS' *Ernest & Celestine* arrives on Blu-ray/DVD today, as does *This Is America, Charlie Brown* and *Regular Show: The Complete Third Season*, but we know you really want *The LEGO Movie: Everything Is Awesome Edition*.

**Licensing Expo** in Las Vegas offers three days of sampling the latest wares from top franchises and their partners. ([licensingexpo.com](http://licensingexpo.com))



**24** If you need a break from all the summer festivals, crank up the AC and crash out with *The Boondocks: The Complete Fourth Season*, *Dragon Ball Z: Season 5* on Blu-ray or *Appleseed: Alpha* in stores now.

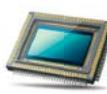
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# The Animated Movie Dossier

The past few years have seen familiar animated faces as well as franchise reboots and original concepts raking in the box office bucks, and the toon features landscape for the next few years shows no sign of slowing down. In honor of summer blockbuster season, we present our annual guide to the 2D, CG and stop-motion titles you should save your change for in the coming years. For an expanded version of this dossier, visit us online at [www.animationmagazine.net](http://www.animationmagazine.net).

## 2014

### **Postman Pat: The Movie**

RGH Pictures, DreamWorks Classics | May 23 (U.K.)

**Director:** Mike Disa

**Writers:** Nicole Dubuc, Annika Bluhm, Kim Fuller



**Cast:** Stephen Mangan, Jim Broadbent, Rupert Grint, Ronan Keating, David Tennant

**Story:** When Greendale's contented mail carrier Postman Pat makes it onto a televised talent show, various Patbot 3000 robots are deployed to take his place. But this turns out to be an insidious plot to take over the world, and Postman Pat must return to town to save the day.

### **How to Train Your Dragon 2**

DreamWorks Animation | June 13

**Director:** Dean DeBlois

**Writer:** Dean DeBlois, based on the books by Cressida Cowell

**Cast:** Jay Baruchel, Gerard Butler, Craig Ferguson, America Ferrera, Jonah Hill, Christopher Mintz-Plasse, T.J. Miller, Kristen Wiig, Kit Harington, Cate Blanchett, Djimon Hounsou

**Story:** Five years on since Hiccup and Toothless have united the Vikings of Berk with their dragon companions, the inseparable duo take to the skies to chart unmapped territories while the rest of the gang are busy challenging each other to dragon races. When one of their adventures leads them to discover a secret ice cave home to hundreds of new dragon species and the mysterious Dragon Rider, Hiccup and Toothless find themselves in the middle of a battle to protect the peace and change the future of men and



dragons.

### **Planes: Fire & Rescue**

DisneyToon Studios | July 18

**Director:** Bob Gannaway

**Cast:** Dane Cook, Julie Bowen, Curtis Armstrong, Ed Harris, Wes Studi, Dale Dye

**Synopsis:** When world famous air racer



Dusty Crophopper learns his engine is damaged and he may never race again, he shifts gears and launches into the world of wildfire air attack. Joining forces with veteran rescue copter Blade Ranger and his team – super scooper Li'l Dipper, heavy-lift helicopter Windlifter, ex-military transport Cabbie and brave little ATVs known as The Smokejumpers – Dusty helps them battle a massive wildfire and learns what it takes to be a true hero.

### **When Marnie Was There**

Studio Ghibli | July 19 (Japan)

**Director:** Hiromasa Yonebayashi

**Writers:** Hiromasa Yonebayashi, Keiko Niwa, Masashi Ando



**Story:** Set on the Norfolk, England, seaside, this ethereal tale centers on friendless Anna, whose life changes when she meets a mysterious girl named Marnie among the sand dunes. When Marnie vanishes and a new family moves into her house, Anna learns that her friend was not all that she seemed.

### **The Boxtrolls**

LAIKA, Focus Features | Sept. 26

**Directors:** Graham Annable, Anthony Stacchi

**Writer:** Irena Brignull, based on *Here Be Monsters*, by Alan Snow



**Cast:** Isaac Hempstead Wright, Elle Fanning, Ben Kingsley, Simon Pegg, Nick Frost, Richard Ayoade, Tracy Morgan, Jared Harris, Toni Collette

**Story:** Set in a Victorian-inspired world where social status and wealth revolve around the stinkiest of cheeses, a young orphaned boy is raised by underground trash collectors known as Boxtrolls who are feared by the citizens of the upper world. When a social-climbing villain sets out to exterminate the monsters, the boy risks everything to save his misunderstood friends.

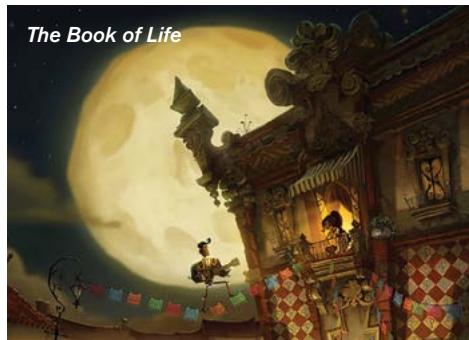
## The Book of Life

Reel FX, Fox | Oct. 17

**Director:** Jorge Gutierrez

**Writer:** Jorge Gutierrez

**Cast:** Channing Tatum, Zoe Saldana, Diego Luna, Christina Applegate



**Story:** Manolo, a young man torn between his family's expectations and his heart's desires, embarks on an incredible journey through three fantastical worlds to face his greatest fears before deciding on his life's path. Additional voices provided by Ice Cube, Ron Perlman, Cheech Marin, Placido Domingo, Danny Trejo and more.

## Big Hero 6

Disney, Marvel | Nov. 7

**Directors:** Don Hall, Chris Williams

**Writers:** Don Hall, Jordan Roberts; based on the Marvel comic book by Duncan Rouleau and Steven T. Seagle

**Cast:** T.J. Miller, Jamie Chung

**Story:** When brilliant robotics prodigy Hiro Hamada finds himself caught up in a criminal



plot that threatens to destroy the high-tech city of San Fransokyo, he must rely on his robot best friend Baymax and a team of first-time crime fighters on a mission to save their city.

## The Penguins of Madagascar

DreamWorks Animation | Nov. 26

**Directors:** Simon J. Smith, Eric Darnell

**Writers:** Michael Colton, John Aboud

**Cast:** Tom McGrath, Chris Miller, John DiMaggio, Christopher Knights, Benedict Cumberbatch, John Malkovich



**Story:** This spinoff from the hit *Madagascar* film franchise will follow undercover penguins Skipper, Kowalski, Rico and Private on their own thrilling spy adventure. Cumberbatch is set to voice a high-ranking animal CIA agent while Malkovich plays the film's charming villain in a story written by the creators of *Modern Humorist*.

## 2014 TBA

### El Americano

Animex, Olmos Prod. | 2014 (Mexico)

**Directors:** Ricardo Arnaiz, Mike Kunkel

**Writers:** Ricardo Arnaiz, Richard Pursel, Phil Roman

**Cast:** Rico

Rodriguez,

Edward

James Olmos,

Argelia Atilano,

Cheech Marin,

Kate del

Castillo, Paul

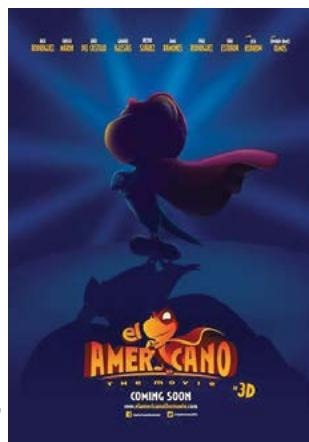
Rodriguez,

K.C. Porter,

Erik Estrada,

Adal Ramones,

Gabrial



Iglesias, Don Cheto, Hector Suarez, Liza Kudrow, Pierre Angelo

**Story:** Produced for the Spanish and English-language markets (thanks to distribution partner Phil Roman Entertainment) the film will follow a carefree pre-teen parrot named Cuco who ventures to Hollywood to enlist the help of his favorite hero in order to help his father and protect his circus family from an insidious enemy.

## Jack and the Cuckoo-Clock Heart

EuropaCorp, France 3, Ile de France, Canal+, CineCinema, Walking the Dog, Ufilm | 2014

**Directors:** Mathias Malzieu, Stephane Berla

**Writer:** Mathias Malzieu, based on the graphic novel and album by Dionysus

**Cast:** Orlando Seale, Stephane Cornicard, Sophia Ellis, Samantha Barks



**Story:** Jack's story begins when he is born in Scotland in 1874, on the coldest day of the year. When his young heart stops beating, a clever midwife replaces it with a mechanical one allowing him to live. However, Jack must avoid strong emotion, which might disrupt his heart's delicate machinery.

## The Snow Queen 2: The Snow King

Wizart Animation | 2014 (Russia)

**Story:** Produced by

Timur Bekmambetov

(*Night Watch*) with

Zambezia's Ned Lott

serving as casting and

voice director, this

Russki CG sequel

will follow the further

adventures of Orm the

troll, whose victory over

the Snow Queen has

given his fellows a taste for freedom.



## Song of the Sea

Cartoon Saloon | 2014 (Ireland)

**Director:** Tomm Moore

**Writer:** Will Collins

**Cast:** Brendan Gleeson, Fionnula Flanagan, David Rawle

**Story:** Inspired by Irish folk legend, the film

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centers on the last of the Seal-Children, Saoirse and her brother Ben who embark on a fantastic journey across a fading world of ancient legend and magic in an attempt to return to their home by the sea. GKIDS has acquired U.S. release rights.



**Directors:** Richard Starzak, Mark Burton

## Home

DreamWorks Animation | March 27

**Director:** Tim Johnson

**Writers:** Tom J. Astle, Matt Ember; based on *The True Meaning of Smekday* by Adam Rex

**Cast:** Jim Parsons, Rihanna, Jennifer Lopez, Steve Martin



**2015**

## SpongeBob SquarePants 2

Paramount | Feb. 13

**Director:** Paul Tibbitt

**Writers:** Stephen Hillenburg, Paul Tibbitt

**Cast:** Tom Kenny, Bill Fagerbakke, Rodger Bumpass, Clancy Brown,



Carolyn Lawrence, Mr. Lawrence, Antonio Banderas, Slash

**Story:** The globally popular sea critters of Hillenburg's top ranking animated series return to the big screen for a new adventure, with regular TV show cast reprising their familiar roles and Antonio Banderas playing a pirate. The film will combine animation with live-action scenes (directed by Mike Mitchell) shot in Savannah and Tybee Island.

## Shaun the Sheep Movie

Aardman Animations | March 20 (U.K.)



## Monster Trucks

Paramount | May 29

**Director:** Chris Wedge

**Writers:** Jonathan Aibel, Glenn Berger

**Cast:** Jane Levy, Lucas Till, Frank Whaley, Danny Glover, Amy Ryan, Holt McCallany

**Story:** The planned live-action/animation hybrid film is said to be a *Transformers*-like take on the world of monster trucks. Aibel and Berger previously scripted *Kung Fu Panda* for DreamWorks, and *Ice Age* helmer Chris Wedge is reportedly in negotiations to direct.

## B.O.O.: Bureau of Otherworldly Operations

DreamWorks Animation | June 5

**Director:** Tony Leondis

**Writer:** Tom Wheeler

**Cast:** Seth Rogen, Melissa McCarthy, Bill Murray, Rashida Jones, Matt Bomer, Octavia Spencer, Jennifer Coolidge, Benjamin Stockham

**Story:** Based on an original story created by Leondis, the film centers on the B.O.O., a top-secret



government agency which employs ghosts to protect humans from evil hauntings. When new agents Jackson Moss and Watts uncover a plot by the agency's Most Wanted Haunter to destroy the Bureau, they must use their skills to defeat his ghoulish army and save the world.

### Inside Out

Disney-Pixar | June 19

**Director:** Pete Docter; co-director, Ronnie Del Carmen

**Writer:** Michael Arndt

**Cast:** Amy Poehler, Lewis Black, Mindy Kaling, Bill Hader, Phyllis Smith

*Inside Out*



**Story:** When happy-go-lucky preteen Riley is uprooted from her pleasant life in Minnesota to be thrust into a new, unwelcome one in San Francisco, her internal emotions take over – unhappily for her baffled parents. Anger, Disgust, Fear, Sadness and Joy spar, collaborate and miscommunicate with one another while trying to keep Riley functional and help her find new friends.

### Minions

Universal/Illumination | July 10

**Directors:** Pierre Coffin, Kyle Balda

**Writer:** Brian Lynch

**Cast:** Sandra Bullock, Jon Hamm

**Story:** This spin-off of Illumination's hit *Despicable Me* flicks tells the history of the little yellow henchmen known as the Minions, who have existed since the beginning of time with the sole purpose of serving history's most ambitious villains.



*Minions*

After their ineptitude ruins all their masters (including a T. Rex and Dracula) they flee to Antarctica to live in isolation. But in the 1960s, boredom drives some of them out into the world to find a new master, leading them to the stylish Scarlet Overkill who is bent on world-domination.



### Hotel Transylvania 2

Sony Pictures Animation | Sept. 25

**Cast:** Adam Sandler, Selena Gomez, Andy Samberg

### Peanuts

Blue Sky, Fox | Nov. 6

**Director:** Steve Martino

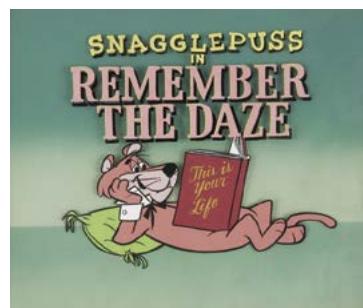
**Writers:** Bryan Schulz, Craig Schulz, Cornelius Uliano; based on the classic comic strip by Charles M. Schulz.



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## FEATURES

### The Good Dinosaur

Disney-Pixar | Nov. 25

**Director:** Bob Peterson

**Writers:** Enrico Casarosa, Bob Peterson

**Cast:** Lucas Neff, John Lithgow, Frances McDormand, Neil Patrick Harris, Judy Greer, Bill Hader

**Story:** What if the cataclysmic asteroid collision that changed life on Earth forever never happened, and dinosaurs never became extinct?

This is the key premise of *The Good Dinosaur*, which centers on a teenage

Apatosaurus named Arlo who sets out on a quest to restore peace after a traumatic event rattles his tranquil community. Along the way, he meets an unlikely travel companion: a young human boy named Spot. Peterson was removed from the production in 2013, and the Pixar Brain Trust has since taken on different parts of the film to be completed.



### Kung Fu Panda 3

DreamWorks Animation, Oriental DreamWorks | Dec. 23

**Director:** Jennifer Yuh Nelson

**Writers:** Jonathan Aibel, Glenn Berger

**Starring:** Jack Black, Angelina Jolie, Dustin

Hoffman, Jackie Chan, Seth Rogen, Lucy Liu, David Cross, Bryan Cranston, Mads Mikkelsen, Rebel Wilson

**Synopsis:** Continuing his legendary adventures of awesomeness, Po must face two distinct foes: one supernatural, and one closer to home. This will be the first feature collaboration with Oriental DreamWorks in Shanghai – though with Guillermo del Toro serving as exec producer, fans should expect plenty of kung fu action and magical peril.



has scared off every potential tenant with ease. That is, until the Otis family from America moves in.



### Evangelion: Final

Studio Khara | 2015 (Japan)

**Director:** Hideaki Anno

**Writer:** Hideaki Anno

**Story:** The ultimate entry in the four-part “rebuilding” film series will wrap up the struggles of the NERV pilots in their powerful Evangelion robots against the destructive Angels that threaten the world.

### Legend of the NeverBeast

DisneyToon Studios | 2015

**Director:** Steve Loter

**Story:** The latest story from Pixie Hollow stars fun and talented animal fairy Fawn, who believes you can't judge a book by its cover and thus befriends a huge mysterious creature known as the NeverBeast. When the Scout Fairies set out to capture the creature, Fawn must convince Tinker Bell and her friends of its gentle nature in order to save her new pal. ♦



## 2015 TBA

### The Canterville Ghost

Arc Productions | 2015 (U.K.)

**Director:** Kim Burdon

**Writers:** Keiron Self, Giles New, based on the story by Oscar Wilde

**Cast:** Hugh Laurie, Stephen Fry, Imelda Staunton, Freddie Highmore, Miranda Hart, Toby Jones

**Story:** Sir Simon de Canterville has been haunting his ancestral home in England, Canterville Chase, for over three centuries. The cantankerous specter



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# Building Up to Epic

Writer-director Dean DeBlois steers Hiccup, Toothless and the rest of the Vikings of Berk straight into trilogy territory on a large scale with *How to Train Your Dragon 2*. By Tom McLean.

**D**reamWorks Animation's *How to Train Your Dragon* was an unexpected hit when it was released in 2010. Co-directors Dean DeBlois and Chris Sanders had taken over the film just a little more than a year out from release and revamped the story from the ground up. Earning positive reviews from critics and audiences, the film earned nearly a half-billion dollars at the box office and put the question of a sequel front and center.

When DreamWorks Animation CEO Jeffrey Katzenberg asked DeBlois if he had ideas for a sequel, DeBlois came back with a bigger idea. "If the first movie was the first act, this second film could be the middle act, but we would need a third to bring it to conclusion," DeBlois says.

The trilogy proposal intrigued Katzenberg and, with Sanders having moved on full-time to *The Croods*, it was a chance for DeBlois to step up and write and direct on his own the sequel, *How to Train Your Dragon 2*, out June 13. "It was a healthy bit of growth for me to be honest," he says. "It's one thing to be a team and backing each other up, and it's a different matter entirely when you have to trust your convictions."

DeBlois says as a viewer he has an aversion to sequels because most of them are disappointing in that they don't live up to the original or are too much of a retread. He looked at the few sequels he thought really worked and was most

inspired by one of the most-universally admired and successful sequels of all time: *The Empire Strikes Back*. "It took everything I loved about *Star Wars* and expanded it in all the best ways," he says. "The fun became that much more powerful, there were new gadgets and new characters and the peril and the scope were bigger without losing sight of what it's all about."

Knowing that DreamWorks was committed to a trilogy was useful in coming up with the story for *Dragon 2*. "I looked back at the first movie, and it's a complete experience unto itself," he says. "If we were going to tell a grander story, there were elements that had been slightly glazed over, like [what happened to Hiccup's] mother. That was a story thread we could draw out."



Another key decision was moving the story and the characters ahead five years. "Fifteen-year-old Hiccup is quite happy – he earned his father's admiration, was accepted by the village, got the girl and got a super cool dragon. By the end of the first movie, it's all resolved," he says. "Now, five years later, he's the town hero and there's the expectation for him to step into his father's shoes. He's got that restlessness, standing on the cusp of adulthood. It's Hiccup defining himself."

The result is an epic tale that expands the story of Hiccup, played again by Jay Baruchel, his trusty dragon Toothless and the Viking land of Berk. Having fully incorporated dragons into their lives following the events of the first movie, exploring new frontiers tempts Hiccup more than following his father Stoick's path of leading the tribe. What he finds is both personal and epic, as he encounters the threat of dragon hunters in the service of Drago Bludvist, played by Djimon Hounsou, and a kindred spirit in his long-lost mother, Valka, played by Cate Blanchett. The movie also introduces Eret, voiced by *Game of Thrones'* Kit Harington, and features the return of the original voice cast: America Ferrera as Astrid, Gerard Butler as Stoick, Craig Ferguson as Gobber, Jonah Hill as Snoutlout, T.J. Miller as Tuffnut, Kristin Wiig as Ruffnut and Christopher Mintz-Plasse as Fishlegs.

DeBlois, who wrote the movie based loosely



on the books by Cressida Cowell, says the biggest difference between working on the first and second film was the second film had the luxury of time. "Chris and I both came into *Dragon 1* about 14 to 15 months out from release," he says. "We took the assets that had been built, the characters and world and used as much of that as possible. However, it didn't have all the bells and whistles we could have afforded if we had a longer, standard production time and a full budget to work with."

With four years between release dates, DeBlois says they were able to rebuild the characters from the ground up and incorporate a new generation of software into the DreamWorks pipeline called Apollo that vastly improved the toolset and interface for the animators.

"While we were finishing up the first *Dragon* we had some conversations with the developers and they gave us kind of a window into the future," says Simon Otto, head of character animation on the movie.

The animators were consulted on what they wanted from animation software if it were to be re-created from the ground up. The overall mes-

sage was for an intuitive system with a user interface that allowed artists to more directly interact artistically with characters and see them render and move in real time, and reducing or eliminating the need to wrangle data, Otto says.

The result, with artists working via a stylus on a touch-screen display, was liberating for the animators, Otto says. "It feels a lot more like a computer game. We spend very little time doing anything besides pushing the characters around, and we don't have to manage data the way we used to."

That allowed animators to spend more time exploring ideas and refining their work and having a toolset that supported those ideas. "You can find your way to the performance, which was kind of hard before," Otto says.

The results are easily seen in the final film, where the character performances achieve a level of detail and subtlety that sets a new standard for DreamWorks. "A lot of it comes from having the time, having talented animators and giving them the time to go back and tweak on the most minute levels," says DeBlois.

Especially key is the interface, which removes the need to wrangle data and re-render

and allows animators to use a stylus and touch-screen display to work directly with characters in real time. "It's like the digital equivalent of a stop-motion animator working with a clay puppet," DeBlois says. "It's putting a tool back in the hand of the animator."

Those changes were key in developing Valka and Drago. "They were both incredibly challenging and it was a journey and an adjustment to find the characters," says Otto. Valka had to be mysterious at first, having spent so many years living among dragons, but ultimately likeable when she revealed herself as a Dian Fossey-style protector of the creatures.

"We went a little crazy at first and went too far," says Otto. "We had to tone her down and bring her back a bit." He says they found the character through animation, and only after trying out a few versions of her sequences did they find the right balance.

Drago, meanwhile, got a boost from the casting of Hounsou as his voice, which inspired separate design takes to come up with the dreadlocked look the character eventually developed, Otto says. He also had to move in a very specific

way due to a plot point in the movie, requiring an idiosyncrasy in his performance.

As for the dragons, the sequel presented an opportunity to improve their designs and expand the number and type of dragons almost exponentially. Otto says they wanted as much diversity as possible, starting by basing designs on more traditional dragon looks and then stretching the idea as far as possible. Each one was grounded in some way with an animal and designed to be as instantly recognizable as possible.

For example, Valka's dragon, Cloud Jumper, had a kind of alien but mesmerizing look, Otto says. "We started looking at owls. We were really grounding the idea of that character in an idea we knew the audience would know."

The movie deftly handles its epic battle sequences as well as it does its character moments, again upping the ante in a massive dragon battle in which opposing forces backed by giant dragons engage in a beachfront battle. Again, the new technology was essential in bringing a new level of complexity to those se-

quences. "That type of shot wouldn't have been feasible in the past," DeBlois says. "We could barely have a few characters on screen at the same time and the animators would have to turn off any other characters they were working on."

Creating those action sequences was a long process of refinement. Each character, for example, has their own storyline within the sequence and there was a lot of whittling down and rethinking how to present those individual stories as it developed.

"It's definitely trial and error," says DeBlois. "We had big ambitions; we wanted a full on *Lord of the Rings* type battle and I think it has a great sense of scale."

As with the first film, there is a healthy dose of comic relief in *Dragon 2*, an element DeBlois says he finds refreshing and invigorating when working on such a long project. "It's such a key ingredient in the soup," he says. "The comedy just adds a refresher [to the process] and reassures you."

DeBlois says the high bar set by original

movie and everyone's desire to ensure the sequel matched it was an important reality check. "We would constantly check with ourselves, is this good enough? Is it equal to and better than the first movie? It kept us honest."

Having completed the second act of his trilogy, DeBlois is anxious to see how the film is received. Early reviews have been positive and the film was extremely well received at the Cannes Film Festival.

He's happy with the film and ready to take a break before jumping onto *Dragon 3*, set for release in 2016, even as he's keenly aware of the challenges the third chapter – for which he has a well-referenced outline – will pose.

The long haul of making an animated movie can be difficult, especially when you're reviewing a sequence or scene dozens of times. "It really is a part of the discipline of directing an animated movie and remembering what was really successful about an idea," he says. "You have to remember that first response, and then as the movie develops, some ideas get squeezed out." ♦

**The animators experimented with different performances for the new character Valka before deciding they had found the right mix of motherly and mysterious for Hiccup's long-lost mom.**



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# The Joy of Independence

A veteran of the indie scene explains why it's worth it to go your own way in the first of a new series of columns. By Martin Grebing.

I've never been a big fan of coloring inside the lines. Well, maybe a little at first, but once I figured out the game, creating my own lines became paramount.

I'm here to tell you how great being independent is, but I'm also here to tell you it's not all roses. Going out on your own can be a harrowing experience. At the beginning, you will more than likely fail more than you succeed. There's a good chance you will be late with rent, your car payments, student loans and a host of other bills more than a few times. You may not know when or where your next meal will appear. You may have to beg and borrow from everyone you know.

The struggle to become independent is more than just a collection of harsh learning lessons; it's a rite of passage. However, if this is your true calling and you can persist against a world that seems hell-bent on the demise of anyone who dares buck the system, the rewards can be exponentially sweeter. But be warned: Once this level is achieved, there is no turning back. Once you've tasted the inde-

**Martin Grebing**



the unemployed or even a wandering monk who travels through the Old West armed only with his spiritual training and skill in martial arts. But for the sake of this article, let's focus on the successful independent animator, artist, or creative small business owner-operator who is not tied

where you want. How would you like to make \$1,000 in a day from your home studio, never needing to change out of your pajamas while a movie marathon of your favorite films plays in the background? I don't know about you, but for me that sounds a lot like heaven. What about taking your laptop and umbrella to the beach, sipping on fruity drinks under the sun, hearing the waves crash against the sand and seagulls caw while animating a character for a local advertising agency? With today's technology, you can work almost anywhere in the world and deliver your content to almost any other place in the world and your clients might not even know the difference.

## The Ability to Stretch

Being independent makes your calendar elastic. Days of the week tend to lose their meaning in a traditional sense. Highs and lows are not dictated by the day of the week but rather what goals are accomplished, how much fun you have being your own boss, and how many times you thank the stars for not being a member of the Miserable Monday Club.

Being independent means unlimited earnings potential. This one deserves repeating: unlimited earnings potential! Chances are, you're already an overachiever and make no qualms about working 80-plus hours in a week, so why not do it for yourself and your own dreams? Want to make \$10,000 this week? There's nothing holding you back, it's all up to you to find the clients and projects to make it happen.

Being independent certainly has its challenges and is definitely not for everyone, but for those that dare the rewards can be phenomenal. It's more than doing your own thing, more than having unlimited earnings potential, more than being able to call your own shots. Being independent is, in a word, freedom.

---

Martin Grebing is an award-winning animation director and producer who has focused his career on smaller studios and alternative markets. Today, he provides creative consulting and is the owner-operator of Funnybone Animation, a boutique studio that produces animation for a wide range of clients and industries. He can be reached at [www.funnyboneanimation.com](http://www.funnyboneanimation.com).

The struggle to become independent is a rite of passage. However, if you can persist against a world that seems hell-bent on the demise of anyone who dares buck the system, the rewards can be exponentially sweeter.

pendent lifestyle, the mere thought of returning to the 9-to-5 grind will forevermore send nauseating shivers down your spine.

## Defining Independence

Before digging too deep, let's take a look at exactly what being independent means from a dictionary perspective: 1) Not relying on others for aid or support. 2) Not being under the rule or control of another.

These definitions could apply to those that are independently wealthy and don't need or want to work. They could also loosely apply to

down by the confines of a standard 9-to-5 job.

Being independent means having the power to choose lifestyle first. How much money do you want to make? How many hours per week do you want to work? Want to take off this Tuesday? How about next month? Want to sleep until noon because you were up late last night checking out a DJ without needing to call into work, pretending to be sick? Not a problem as long as you have all your responsibilities taken care of in advance so everything runs smoothly while you're on siesta.

Being independent means you can work any-

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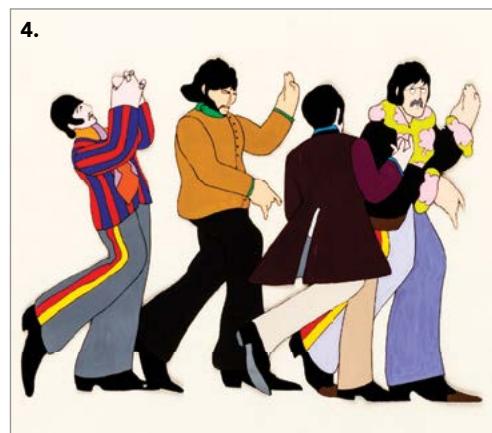


1. Original hand-inked hand-painted production cel of Maleficent on an Eyvind Earle master pan castle interior background "Sleeping Beauty", 1959  
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2. Original hand-inked hand-painted Courvoisier Production cel of the Evil Queen holding the Heart Box from "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs", 1937  
Est. \$20,000

3. Original one of a kind Mary Blair concept Art painting, tempura on board, of Peter Pan and Tiger Lily from the 1953 Walt Disney film "Peter Pan"  
Est. \$15,000 - \$20,000

4. Original one of a kind hand-painted production cel of John, Paul, George and Ringo singing 'Nowhere Man' in the 1968 feature animated film "Yellow Submarine"  
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# Re-Versioning to Form

Producer Mychal Simka finds success spinning foreign animated features into a new form. By Tom McLean.

**M**ychal Simka grew up in Anaheim, Calif., a huge fan of a guy named Walt Disney who created a local theme park and made some of the best animated movies ever made. As an adult, he's come to work in the animation industry Disney pioneered, though in a decidedly atypical fashion.

Simka is the writer, director and producer of "re-versioned" animated features. That means he takes movies produced abroad in non-English languages and finds a way to adapt them for an American audience, primarily through editing and completely rewriting the dialog into what can be called, at the very least, a major re-mix of the original movie and at best an essentially brand-new feature.

His most-recent film is *Birds of Paradise*, a re-version of a 2010 movie produced in Argentina and released as *Plumiferos*. Released by Lionsgate as an exclusive for Walmart and Sam's Club stores, it's the eighth such project for Simka and features the voices of Drake Bell, Ken Jeong, Jon Lovitz, Ashley Tisdale, Jane Lynch and Keith David.

Simka has a lot to say about what goes into his re-versioned movies, how he works with his voice cast and his aspirations for emulating the career of his hero, Walt Disney.

**Animation Magazine:** What was the process of bringing this film to an American audience?

**Simka:** We took the script, we translated it into English and then we simplified the whole movie down to what this movie's all about, and that was: Don't judge a book by its cover; or, don't judge a bird by its feathers. It's about a sparrow who spills paint on himself and he thinks he's an exotic bird and he gains all this confidence. He's able to talk to the birds that he likes, he enters a race and eventually does some heroic things. But he learns at the end that you know you've gotta be yourself and the color of his feathers didn't really matter. After

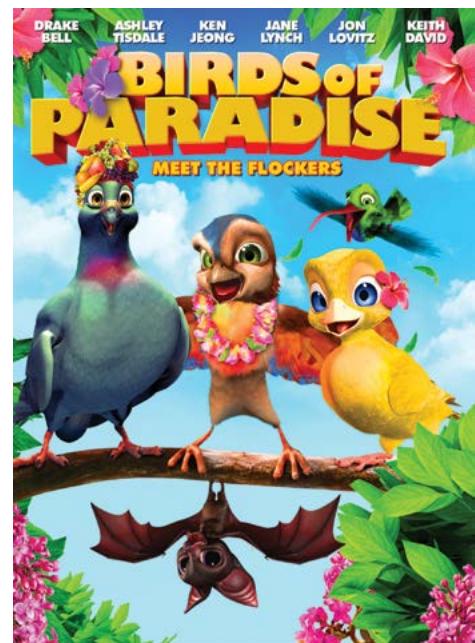
that, I looked at all the characters – there's a pigeon, there's a hummingbird, there's a bat – and we said, 'What actor would be amazing for this role?' I got Ken Jeong as the pigeon, I got Jon Lovitz as the hummingbird. And then I went with my writers and we took a month or two and just started writing jokes through the whole thing and really just draw out those themes.

**Q:** What were the limitations of re-versioning a film that's already been animated?

**Simka:** If a bird opens his beak you can sub whatever that word was supposed to be for probably a thousand other words. We literally changed every word in the script; maybe one or two words survived from the original translation. But with the phonetic content and everything, I like to think we kept it true to what the original director wanted to do, wanted to express, but we just sort of took it to the next level.

**Q:** Did you do any new animation at all for *Birds of Paradise* or was it all re-writing?

**Simka:** The original title sequence, we took that out completely and put in a three-minute,



multi-plane camera effect animation sequence. I do have a small animation team for that. Or if there's something written in Spanish – or, in some of my other films, it was Chinese – we'll put something in front of that so you can't see that. We're really looking to make these films into American products, and people have compared what I'm doing to what Saban did with the *Power Rangers* back in the '90s.

**Q:** How does your interest in Walt Disney affect what you do with a film like this?

**Simka:** I look at what I'm doing right now as sort of like the '20s for Walt. Walt got started with the shorts, the short subjects. And he did hundreds of those and each one he was making better and better over the course of many years. And I look at the what other people call dubs, what I call re-versioning, as sort of the same place as Walt was with his short subjects. Yes, I really look forward to doing an original feature for one of the major studios. I think that will be amazing, but right now, I love working on the films that I'm working on and making each one just a little bit better than the one before.

**Q:** What's your next project?

**Simka:** I have a couple of animated pilots that I'm working on. There's going to be some more re-versionings. There's some originals with some of the companies that I've re-versioned films for in the past they've approached me to start working on originals. So I'm not sure which direction it's going to go. Another thing that I'd like to do and I'm talking about this with my agent and my manager now, is doing what I do, I could be a great asset not as the main director on a big studio film, but after they're done just make it like 50 percent better than what they already have. That's something I'm looking at right now. ♦

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# Bending Time and Space

**Veteran *Family Guy* producer Kara Vallow and Six Point Harness talk about developing a style worthy of the grand scale of *Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey*. By Tom McLean.**

It should be no surprise that the idea to animate historical sequences for Fox's hit science series *Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey* came from Seth MacFarlane.

Best known as the creator of *Family Guy* and co-creator of *American Dad!* and *The Cleveland Show*, MacFarlane had helped grease the wheels at Fox for the show, a continuation of the classic and monumentally influential 1980 PBS series *Cosmos: A Personal Voyage*, hosted by the late renowned scientist and educator Carl Sagan. MacFarlane's involvement as executive producer and his years of success at Fox put him in the ideal position to propose the series' historical recreations – done in live-action in the original series – could be more effectively and interestingly done with animation.

It was Kara Vallow, a veteran animation producer who had long worked on MacFarlane's various series, to whom MacFarlane gave the responsibility of taking this idea and really making it work.

For her part, Vallow says the suggestion surprised her and at first she had no idea what MacFarlane had in mind or how it was even possible to do it well enough to live up to the grandeur, won-

der and gravitas *Cosmos* was known for.

"It was kind of a puzzle," says Vallow. "I spent one whole night just thinking about it. Is it possible to come up with something that's going to be unique and going to be able to clearly tell these stories and is going to be worthy of this show?"

While the final results have earned nearly

universal praise, both from within the animation community and from the general public, finding that style was a far-from-simple proposition. The animated sequences had to do a lot of things: They had to tell historical tales of real scientists and events in an engaging way,

which is not always easy as many stories lacked a lot of obvious visual punch; they had to accurately convey scientific concepts and information; they had to look of a piece with both the live-action sequences of host Neil DeGrasse Tyson and the slick CGI visual effects created by Rainer Gombos; and they had to not draw the wrong kind of attention to themselves by being too cartoony.

Vallow drafted a small team to develop the animation that consisted of supervising animation director Brent Woods, animation director Lucas Gray, and animation assistant director Andrew Brando. Some of the first conversations with MacFarlane and with executive producer Mitchell Cannold were defined by such unexpected ideas as "graphic novel" and "Indonesian shadow puppetry."

"We were struggling with how do you portray realistic humans," says Woods.





**Storyboards (below) and the final image from the Clair Patterson sequence in episode seven of *Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey*.**

"How do you convey a realistic person without spending literally five years trying to conceive two hours of animation, and not have it seem hokey, not have it seem like you're attempting to do realism."

The first script clarified the issues by calling for a sequence about Giordano Bruno, a 16th century Italian monk whose theories about the Sun being not just the center of the solar system but also just one of the many stars in the universe got him convicted of heresy and burned at the stake.

"It seemed sort of daunting," says Vallow. "I think it was Bruno specifically, it was trying to bring this person to life and elicit empathy and all these things, but my hugest fear was going into that world of hokey animation."

The style developed with a few basic ideas. One was using silhouettes. "Those were very effective, where the characters were silhouetted but they told beautiful stories," says Vallow.

Another was grounding scenes with realistic physics and adding elements like rain, fog, smoke or dust motes that could give a sense of the events taking place in a familiar environment.

And a final key element was creating photorealistic backgrounds – often using photographs – a style developed by Gray. "We'd layer photographic images on top of each other. They were always really happy with the backgrounds because they had a realness to them," says Vallow.

To execute the animation, Vallow turned to Six Point Harness studios, which animated the characters using Flash and composited it together with the backgrounds and effects using After Effects. Many of those choices, Val-



low says, were made to fit time and budgetary constraints. "My first instinct toward using After Effects was money and time and wanting to keep a very contained core for the animation department," she says. "I wanted to choose the people I really trusted."

Vallow had previously worked with Six Point Harness and its principals, Brendan Burch and Greg Franklin, on various projects including a film called *In the Realms of the Unreal*.

"We had to prove what you always have to in Flash, which is that you can animate well in Flash with the right people," says Burch.

Research was a major component of animating *Cosmos* – and not one Vallow's team of *Family Guy* veterans was used to dealing with. From the Bruno sequence, for which there was relatively little reference, the series moved ahead to scientific figures like Isaac Newton, whose home and tools are preserved, right up to relatively recent times like 1960s Pasadena.

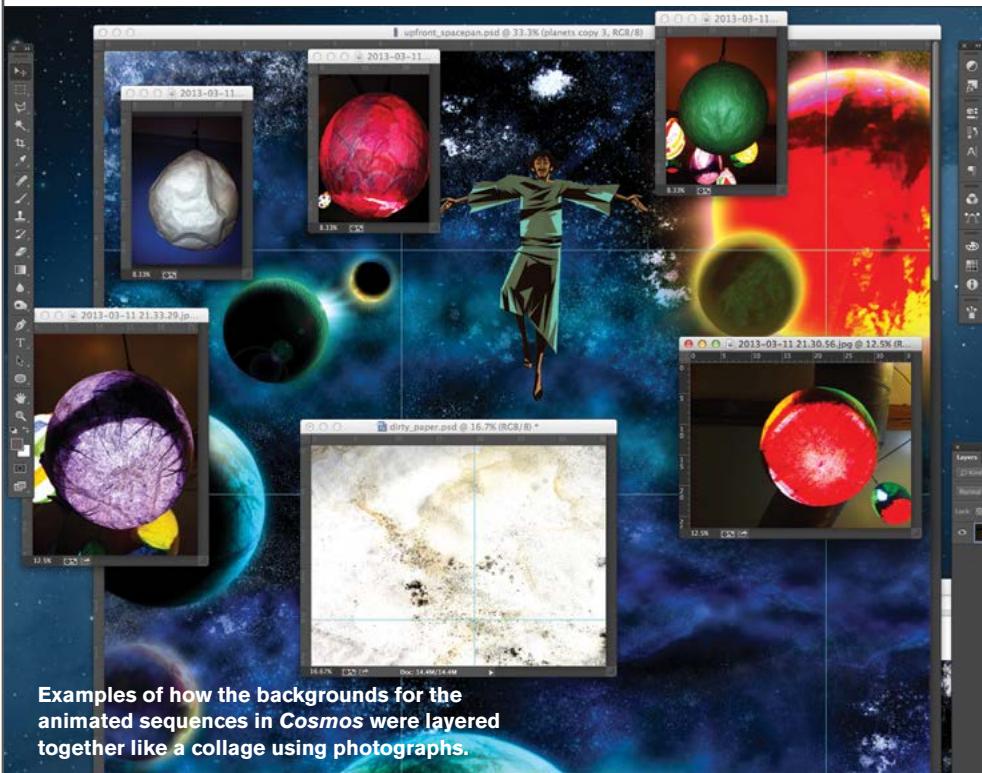
"As we got into the storyboard process, we would work with research – and we would do our own – and that would sometimes greatly affected how we told the story, in a shocking way," says Woods.

For example, episode seven contains an

animated sequence centered on the work of geochemist Clair "Pat" Patterson and how his research into the age of the Earth revealed the extent of the danger posed by lead contamination. The sequence included one where Patterson walked the streets of 1966 Pasadena envisioning the invisible lead contaminants in the environment and on passersby. "Six Point added a lot of the qualities that make this a successful sequence," says Gray. "This was also an interesting moment because it was my first departure, and I think the show's first departure, from real period pieces, and now we're coming up into stuff we all know."

The animators' approach veered toward film noir and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, even going so far as to consider making the sequence in black-and-white. Elements devised for older time periods, like the grunge matte that gave an ancient parchment look to historical sequences, had to be updated for a world close to the one we live in now.

There was a lot of opportunity to embellish and tweak sequences – they could be extended a few frames when needed, or space could be left for musical elements to help tell the story. All quite different from working on



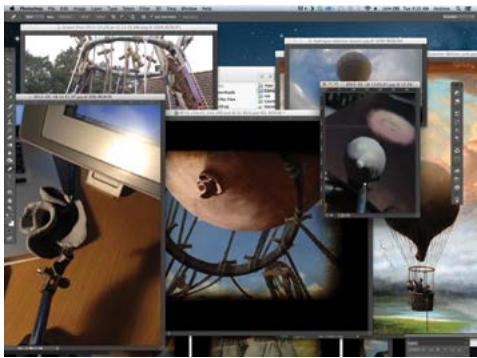
#### Family Guy or American Dad!

"It was real fun to play around with the differences," Vallow says.

Research was meticulous, down to ensuring appropriate tailoring for men's suits and ensuring that the stars in the sky were accu-

rate – down to the exact date, location and time of day. "That stemmed from a comment Neil made about James Cameron's inaccuracy on the night the *Titanic* sunk, that the stars were not correct," says Gray.

Characters were designed by Sah Tan-



tivaranyoo. "It was really tough to hire for. We were really picky," says Burch. "We went through a lot of people early on until we had this really great little core."

"It's not as cartoony as what people in our industry were used to dealing with. I would see people at Six Point who I knew were great animators in that cartoony bouncy world, but would struggle with just a straight-ahead walk cycle because it's not what we do 90 percent of the time," says Gray.

One factor was dealing with producers on the series who were unaccustomed to working with animation and were therefore unfamiliar with its limits and capabilities.

"This group of writer-producers was not as accustomed to the process of animation as we are used to in our world," says Vallow. "And it seemed like they would make bigger changes later than we usually see because it just came to them then."

Vallow says that is a common issue when working with producers new to animation. "Animation is very intimidating to people that can't do it or don't understand it. You don't have control. You can't draw it yourself. You visualize something or you write something and you are putting a lot of faith in other people to create your vision," she says. "And I've seen it again and again – it's very scary for people and I understand it. I've become able to empathize with it, as frustrating as it is."

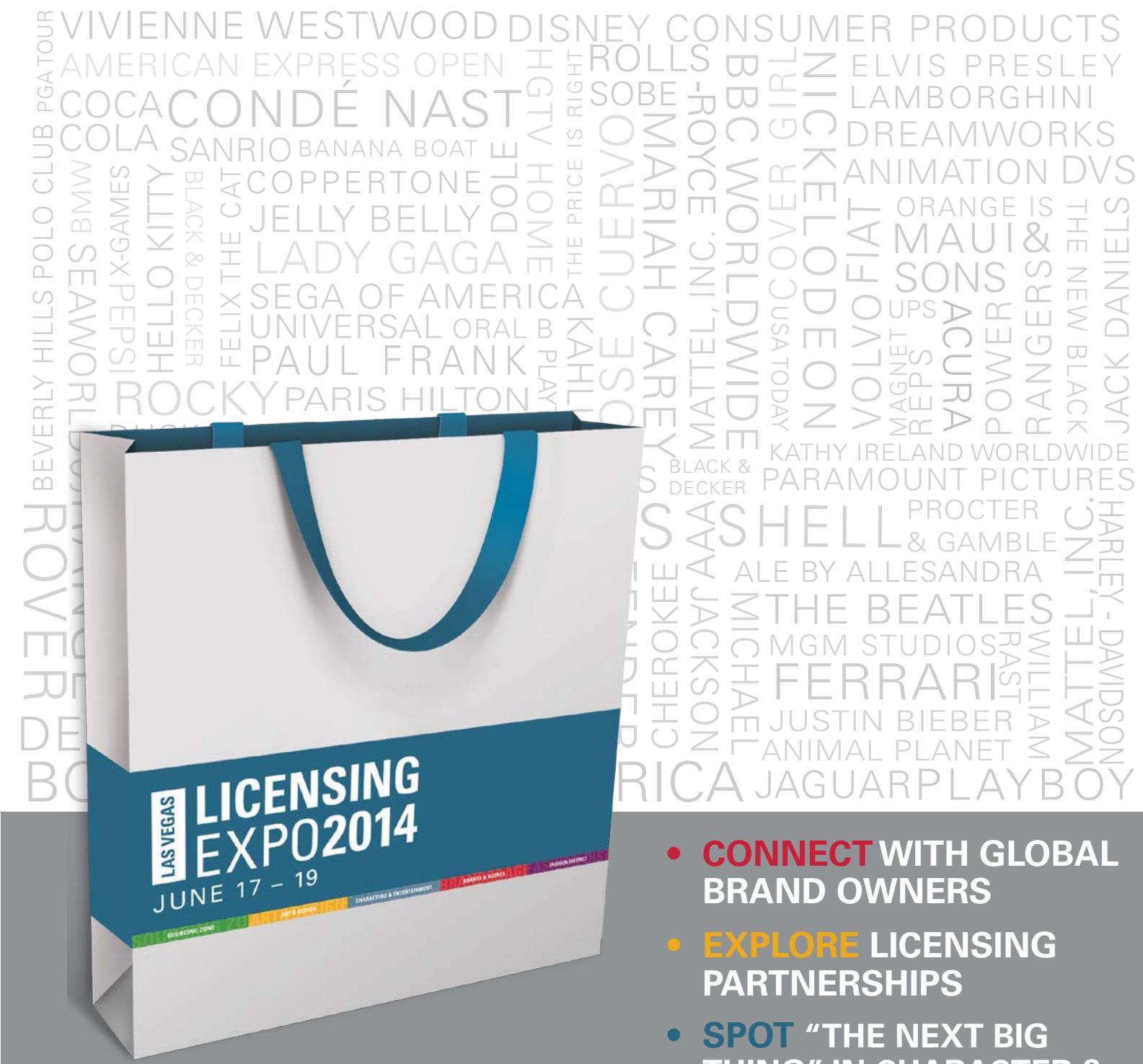
Examples include producers asking for small changes in camera position or a cut to coverage or b-roll – common and easy in live-action but requiring drastic revisions up to redoing entire sequences in animation.

"Every sequence was its own puzzle," says Franklin. "I think the thing that kept everybody going through the whole thing was the fact that we were working on *Cosmos*. This is the greatest honor, of all the projects that have come through our studio, this is the greatest honor, having worked on this show."

"It was a privilege. For the first few episodes it was really difficult and then it got less so and we were able to sort of enjoy the process a little more," says Vallow. ♦



**Photos of real locations and items – sometimes taken with a phone – were combined to create the series' visuals.**



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# Putting A New Spin on Zorro

Cyber Group Studios plans a modern update called *Zorro: The Chronicles* that also sticks to the beloved characters' roots. By Tom McLean.



**G**et ready to get Z'd. The prototypical masked adventurer is getting a new lease on animated life thanks to Cyber Group Studios' new in-production series *Zorro: The Chronicles*, due for delivery in 2015.

The Paris-based studio is giving the well-known masked avenger – best known for his calling card of slashing his initial into whatever is around – a thoroughly modern revamp that also pays tribute to his roots.

Cyber Group Studios president Pierre Sissmann says the studio went back to Zorro's roots as a pulp fiction hero created by Johnston McCulley and first published in 1919 in the pages of *All-Story Weekly #2*.

"The series is really a new way of looking at Zorro," says Sissmann. "It's a pure action comedy, but we wanted to tell a story that goes back to the reasons why Zorro is fighting for justice."

A lot of effort was put into researching the character's historical setting, and the series is set in California in 1820 – one year before Mexico took control of the territory from Spain.

The premise sets up a situation involving the Spanish soldiers, who are trying to maximize their profits from California before they lose control, and the Chumash tribe and ran-

chos who suffer under Spanish rule.

Into this comes the well-known alter-ego of Zorro, Don Diego de la Vega. In this incarnation, he is a 19-year-old of mixed race – his father is a ranchero; his mother Chumash – summoned home from university in Spain by his twin sister, Ines, to try and improve the situation. Coming along with him is his best friend, Bernardo, who completes the triad of lead characters in the show.

Ines is a new addition to the Zorro mythology. "She challenges her brother all the time," says Sissmann. "And it creates a lot of opportunity for action in the scripts, and also a lot of comedy."

The world of *Zorro: The Chronicles* is further fleshed out by a robust supporting cast of characters, including Viceroy Don Estaban Parasol, who rules for the Spanish; Captain Monasterio, a soldier who hopes to marry before returning to Spain; and some comic relief in the form of Sgt. Garcia and Cpl. Gonzalez; and Don Diego's fiancée, Carmen de Villalonga.

The show is nominally aimed at ages 6-10 but Sissmann says the hope is the many different elements they have developed will broaden its appeal.

Now in full production in France on the first of three planned seasons of 26 episodes,

Sissmann says the approach to the series is very cinematic. The company has invested in developing tools that will help it deliver feature-quality visuals on a television production budget and schedule.

"I want to do 26 mini-feature films for television, as opposed to doing 26 television episodes," he says.

Those tools include technology that increases the number of characters that can be animated and the series will have between 100 and 120 distinct characters. "We had to develop the characters for about two years to be able to produce characters that would fit in the budget." A new lighting tool also was developed.

Sissmann says broadcasters are in place in Europe, and once a full episode is complete the company will take it out to show to broadcasters they are in talks with in the United States, Asia and Latin America.

*Zorro: The Chronicles* is one of four shows Cyber Group Studios has in production right now. The others are the second season of *Zou*, its hit preschool series; a second preschool show called *Mia* that is a co-production with Canada's Sardine Productions; and *Mini Ninjas*, a co-production with TF1 based on the popular Square Enix game. ♦

# Meet Molang

**Millimages** preps preschool series based on breakout Korean character. By Tom McLean.

If you think Hello Kitty is cute, wait until you meet *Molang*.

The breakout character, created in 2009 by Korean university student Hye-Ji Yoon, is on a steady path toward television stardom with the preschool set via France-based Millimages.

The company optioned the character last December and based on strong response from broadcasters produced a pilot episode to show at MIP-TV that also was well received.

Developed at Millimages by producer Marie Caroline Villand, the series is an affectionate and humorous look on the relationship between *Molang*, an eccentric and enthusiastic rabbit, and *Piu Piu*, a shy, discreet and emotional little chick. Despite their many differences, these two enjoy a unique friendship.

"They live together; one is a happy character and the other is a bit serious," says Roch Lener, president and CEO of Millimages. "They react differently but they solve all their adventures through understanding, friendship – helping each other. It is funny, but it is also caring."

*Molang* and *Piu Piu* also have a big group of friends they usually meet up with at the end of each episode. The characters express themselves in a universal language that was created from scratch. Though the characters speak an unknown language, they are easy to

understand.

The planned TV series would be 104 episodes of three-and-a-half minutes each that can be linked together as 52 seven-minute episodes. While it's primarily set for TV, the series also is optimized for digital platforms such as phones and tablets and Millimages is planning to develop apps, interactive programs and merchandising to further immerse people in *Molang*'s world.

While the TV series is nominally aimed at preschoolers, Lener says his hope is that the universal appeal of the project would cross over into older age groups – much the same way the character has succeeded in Asia.

After creating *Molang*, Yoon posted the character on her blog and started making stickers. He suddenly became a hit with girls ages 10 to 20. Yoon partnered with FeelBug to create merchandise and licensed products throughout Korea.

Lener says the appeal of the character is very strong in Asia, mostly with girls and young women who know the character as an emoticon on popular Asian chat services, such as



Line, KaKaoTalk and WeChat.

Lener says he expects financing for the series will be completed soon and production to begin by the end of the year. Millimages also is looking for merchandising agents in territories outside of Asia, with the best opportunities in Europe, the United States and Latin America.

"The fact it is already very famous in Asia means it will certainly expand from there," he says, adding that in showing the pilot to potential buyers and partners has found adults respond to it too.

"People are moved by the simplicity of the show," he says. "It's really aiming at a point nobody can miss. It's very clear." ♦



# Meet the Brands

The 2014 Licensing Expo, taking place June 17-19 at Las Vegas' Mandalay Bay Convention Center, is a great place to spot the latest goodies sporting your toon heroes' mugs and the soon-to-be hot properties of 2014 and beyond. Here is just a taste of the Expo's offerings.

## Universal Appeal

**Universal Pictures** has an exciting slate of animated and vfx-heavy projects lined up for the next couple years, and plans to snowball licensees for these fresh and familiar brands. Top priority is LAIKA's neo-Victorian stop-motion flick **The Boxtrolls** (September 26) – so far, Chronicle Books, Little Brown, Funko, Hybrid JEM, Rubie's Costume Company and Toy Factory on board to bring orphan Eggs and his troll family to shelves. Also on the docket are **Jurassic World** (June 12, 2015) – Thinkway Toys is master toy licensee, with Hasbro and Hybrid JEM – and "**Untitled Pets Project**", the upcoming CG comedy adventure from their animation partner Illumination Entertainment.



## Nick Picks

Nickelodeon's perennial, super-absorbent star **SpongeBob SquarePants** could be coming to a putting green near you: the hyperactive yellow fellow has been picked by Loudmouth Golf to grace their new line of golf attire. On offer are mini-shorts, shorts, skorts and capris for women as well as pants and shorts

for men, ranging in price from \$85 to \$395 – which is quite a few clams for the casual fan. SpongeBob true believers can also opt to deck themselves out in a made-to-order Bikini Bottom-ready sportcoat.



For the tykes, Toys 'R' Us is the exclusive retailer of a new line of toys inspired by preschool hit **Paw Patrol**. Expanding to additional retailers in late June, the product range includes a number of collectible items featuring Ryder and his four-footed cohorts Chase, Marshall, Rocky, Rubble, Zuma and Skye, including figures, vehicles, plush, talking plush and play sets for kids ages three and up.



## Springfield Fashion Week



Just when you think you can't possibly cram any more **Simpsons** goodies into your life, the universe finds a way to open your wallet. **20th Century Fox Consumer Products** has teamed up with bakery-themed apparel and accessories boutique Johnny Cupcakes for a new collection featuring Springfield's most notorious denizens. The best buy is an oversized "cupcake mix" box, which contains three collectible items celebrating one of the featured characters: Homer, Bart or Krusty the Clown. Additional treats launched in Johnny Cupcakes "bakeries" and online late last month. U.K. fashion label Drop Dead is also now offering a collection inspired by the show's hyper violent toon-within-a-toon *Itchy & Scratchy*.

If you have more room on your bookshelf than in your dresser, NECA has unveiled which Simpsonified celebrities will appear in the lineup for its third series of *The Simpsons 25 of the Greatest Guest Stars* figurines. In short order you can get your hands on jaundiced versions of Penn and Teller, pro wrestler Bret Hart, Stephen King, Leonard Nimoy and R.E.M. The second series on shelves now is comprised of Britney Spears, Mark Hamill, Lucy Lawless and Tony Hawk, in case you missed the memo.

## You've Got Some CG on Your Shirt

...



Since it's not always socially appropriate to shout out your love for your favorite animated titles, **DreamWorks** has signed a deal with Poeticgem to get you covered – literally. A new apparel line of retro-inspired adult day-wear featuring the fantastical, furred and ferocious stars of DWA's monster franchises **Shrek**, **Kung Fu Panda** and **Madagascar**.



Our only quibble about these high-impact design duds is that the announcement named these properties "classics," which makes us feel incredibly old.

Luckily, DreamWorks has also signed a delicious deal with food licensing company Praim Group, which will be creating a collection of seven decadently DWA-inspired chocolate bars featuring animated char-



ters. Among the properties coming to a terribly tempting display rack near you will be acquired

Classic Media characters Frosty the Snowman, Casper the Friendly Ghost, Underdog, Hot Stuff, Santa Claus Is Coming to Town and two different Shrek designs.



## Technicolor's New Depths



An underwater adventure from Australian graphic novel publishing house Gestalt Comics is getting the CG series treatment thanks to **Technicolor** and its Aussie partners ABC Television and A Stark Production. The Indian company will be attending the expo to court licensing partners to establish a global consumer products program for **The Deep**, which follows the incredible adventures of a family of underwater explorers.

## The Big Cheese



Ever since launching into the publishing world in 2000, Italian property **Geronimo Stilton** has been

burrowing into the hearts of young readers and, thanks to Atlantyca Entertainment's animated series, viewers. Now in addition to enjoying the show and the translated books from Scholastic, recently appointed exclusive licensing agent **Lawless Entertainment** can start plastering the mouse journalist-cum-explorer's mug on all sorts of goodies. Given what a success the little guy has been around the world, you can expect him to have more licensees than there are holes in a Swiss cheese soon enough.

## Essential Adventure Accessories

### Cartoon Network Enterprises

continues to grow its totally algebraic **Adventure Time** property. The 2D animated series from creator Penn Ward has been a ratings hit for four years, and the latest consumer products crop, revealed at New York Toy Fair earlier this year, will include collectibles, games, puzzles



and even pet toys. Master toy partner Jazwares will build on its offerings with more character plush, figures and role play goodies. We'll also see new cards and puzzles from Aquarius Entertainment Merchandising, matching cards from Briarpatch, pet toys and accessories from A Crowded Coop, character statues from Cryptozoic, WriteEms figurines from Factory Entertainment, 3D figure charms from TopCat and **Munchkin: Adventure Time** game from USAopoly later this year.

Expect to see new doohickies and partners lining up for CNE's other top toon properties like **The Amazing World of Gumball**, **Regular Show** and **Ben 10**, and see if you can get the jump on its more recent additions **Clarence** and **Uncle Grandpa** before all the good deals are inked up. (Who doesn't want to see Giant Realistic Flying Tiger on everything in their house?)

## Chipmunks: Evolution

After nearly six decades in the pop culture spotlight, good ol' Dave Seville and his mischievous singing rodents will be undergoing yet another update in 2015 when the new animated series **Alvinnn!!! and The Chipmunks** arrives. In anticipation of a global 'munk takeover, **Bagdasarian Productions**

has built on its relationship with PGS Entertainment, assigning the distribution partner worldwide (excluding North America) licensing stewardship. Commissioned by France's M6, the CG series will be the first small screen outing for the cuddly characters in 20 years and will present a fresh take dreamed up by Janice Karman, plus new original songs from Ross Bagdasarian Jr.



## Money-Making Magic

**Disney Consumer Products** is already cashing in big time on its newly released live-action anti-fairytale **Maleficent**, which retells the story of *Sleeping Beauty* from the dark fairy's perspective and features stunning visual effects and CG creature work. Key

collectibles inspired by the film include Maleficent and Aurora fashion dolls and Maleficent's Glow Horns from Jakks Pacific and Pop! vinyl figures from Funko fashioned after the two heroines. Further licensees include



Stella McCartney Kids (apparel and shoes), Crow's Nest (jewelry), David Lerner (apparel), MAC (cosmetics), HSN (Naeem Khan apparel, Heidi Daus jewelry) and Hot Topic (fashion).

The Mouse House also continues to rack up partners for its box-office smash hit, Academy Award winning CG feature **Frozen**. The film and its acclaimed music have been leveraged into a variety of product lines from top licensees like Mattel,

Jakks Pacific, Franco, Northwest and Just Play, maker of the addictive and adorable Pull Apart Talking Olaf plush. DCP plans to expand lines this fall and is looking into additional categories that will take advantage of the film's iconic music. DCP will likely be auditioning partners for its upcoming animated features *Planes: Fire & Rescue* and *Big Hero 6* as well as its Marvel and *Star Wars* properties at this year's event.



# What's In Your Toy Box?

A few of our favorite things – and where all of the *Animag* staffers' paychecks are going this month.

## LEG-D'OH!

**T**hanks to *The LEGO Movie*, we all know how awesome it is to see a LEGO brick world come to life in animation. And now, thanks to a recent partnership with 20th Century Fox, you can experience the flipside of that. Yep, everyone's favorite cartoon family has been LEGO-fied! There are 16 Springfieldians to collect in the **LEGO Minifigures - The Simpsons Series**, available in single mystery packs for \$3.99. You can keep them cozy in **The Simpsons House**, a buildable kit priced at \$200 that comes with the Simpson family (plus Flanders), furniture, accessories and even the crappy car.



## Goodies for Grown Ups

If there's a special someone in your life (like, yourself) whose love of *Star Wars* and booze surpasses normal levels, they will love you forever if you can hunt down a **Star Wars Pewter Barware Set** (there's one from a reseller on Amazon right now if you can spare \$700). With craftily disguised as four characters (Darth Vader is a corkscrew, Yoda is a bottle stopper, Artoo has a bottle opener and C-3PO wields a foil cutter) you can celebrate your love of George Lucas' films and hide your bar kit in plain sight when your AA sponsor comes over.



If tracking down 25 pounds of pewter geekery sounds

like too much hassle, you can also chill out and knock back a few **Game of Thrones - Fire & Blood Red Ale** from Brewery Ommegang, released in honor of this year's fourth season of the HBO fantasy series. The brewmasters describe it as having "a rich maltiness with assertive hopping and spicy notes from ancho chilies and rye" – perfect for a brew inspired by the motto of House Targaryen. Three collectible bottles sport images of Daenerys' dragons created by

the *Game of Thrones* visual effects team. Also hard to find, but beer hoarding geeks probably won't ask for \$700 for a bottle.



## Frederator Favorites

**L**ook at this **Talking PuppyCat Plush** inspired by Natasha Allegri's awesome webtoon *Bee & PuppyCat*. Just look at it and try not to fall in love, we dare you. Exclusive to the "by fans, for fans" e-tailer WeLoveFine, the 10" toy features a real metal jingle bell on the collar, and speaks and sings when you squeeze its ear. Paying \$23 for a plush toy may sound steep, but the Internet disagrees – Talking PuppyCat is often sold out, so get yours ASAP!



And while you're on WeLoveFine's site, you may as well pre-order the talking **Catbug Vinyl Figure**, another exclusive that will ship in July. The 8½-inch tall figure is priced at about \$40, and in addition to being adorable (only Pendleton Ward's *Bravest Warriors* style could make a crazy feline-insect chimera look cute), Catbug has a built-in motion-sensor which triggers eight different phrases.

## I Dream of Monsters

**A**fter you drink away the pain of spending almost a grand on a sci-fi themed barware set, you'll probably be ready for a nap. We recommend crashing out with the official **Domo Blanket** available from ThinkGeek for \$24.99. The 50-inch-by-60-inch throw is made of cuddly fleece and features the television mascot turned international sensation's distinctive open-mawed face. If you're more into gentle, giant forest sprites than chomp-happy



brown monsters, May we draw your attention to the **Totoro Bed**. On the one hand, it's probably not officially licensed since it seems to be only available on eBay from a variety of sellers, most in China, for about \$150-\$300. On the other hand, it's a bed that looks like Totoro. So ... yeah. ♦



# Zag Comes to America

**Zagtoon brings *Ladybug* to Licensing Expo ahead of the opening of its new Glendale studios and big plans for the United States.** By Tom McLean.



Sometimes, there is just no substitute for being right where the action is. And that's the reason ZAG is planning to make a big splash in the United States with the market debut of its full CGI animated series *Ladybug* and the opening of its new TV & feature film studios in Glendale.

"To successfully establish global franchises, you also need that U.S. spirit inside the project," says Jeremy Zag, the Parisian founder of Zagtoon, a division of ZAG Entertainment.

A prolific animation producer well-known in Europe, ZAG is building a 40,000-square-foot studio in Glendale, just down the street from DreamWorks Animation, the Disney creative campus and Nickelodeon that will house production activities, executive offices and creative talent. (It also will include an authentic French bistro that will be open to the public) Now under construction, the goal is for the studio campus to be open and fully functional later this summer.

The new studio is expected to launch with

three new franchises with U.S. broadcasters and master toy partners on board, using both U.S. and French talent," Zag says. "We need to have a presence in the U.S. to make that happen."

As part of its introduction to the United States, ZAG is for the first time bringing one of its properties to an American trade show with the arrival of *Ladybug* at this year's Licensing Expo in Las Vegas.

In production with a green light for 26 half-hour episodes, *Ladybug* tells the tale of Parisian junior high-school student Marinette, who is a somewhat shy student by day and a superhero by night. She teams up to save the city from evil with another superhero named Chat Noir, who is secretly by day her classmate Adrien. Neither knows the other's secret identity – nor that they secretly have a crush on each other.

The CGI-animated series was the No. 1 selection at the 2013 MIPCOM Jr. Worldwide Screening and has since achieved global distribution in more than 120 markets, as well as



Jeremy Zag

partnerships with Disney, TF1, SamG, SK, Toei Animation, Method, Bandai, PGS and AB GROUP.

Talks with broadcasters are underway to bring the series to air in the United States, with future plans for the franchise, including a significant licensing program and potential full-length feature film.

Additional animated properties in ZAG's pipeline include *Ghost Force*, an action-comedy about teenage ghost hunters expected to go into production this year, and a music property called *Superstar* that is in development. *Ghost Force* is one of several brands ZAG is developing with Man of Action Studios, creators of *Ben 10*.

"We are very happy to make productions with teams of international talent based in Europe, Asia and North America," says Zag.

He founded Zagtoon, a TV division of Zag Entertainment, in 2009 with Jacqueline Tordjman and began developing properties throughout Europe, the United States and Asia. ZAG currently has offices in Paris, Tokyo, Seoul, Brussels and Los Angeles. ♦



France-based Zagtoon is preparing a major U.S. launch, leading off with its superhero series *Ladybug*.

# Passion Play

**Between Frames: The Art of Brazilian Animation** uncovers hidden gems and recaptures the pioneering spirit of Alvaro Marins' lost *The Kaiser*. By Tom McLean

**A**nimation has proven its appeal to audiences worldwide with hit after hit. But the history of animation also spans the globe and produces some unexpected gems for those willing to seek them out.

Such was the case for director Eduardo Calvet and producer Felipe Haurelhuk, who collaborated on an effort to bring the unexpectedly rich history of animation in Brazil to light in the documentary feature *Between Frames: The Art of Brazilian Animation*. The pair met when they both worked in Brazilian television, where Calvet had done a series called *Brazilian Comics*. A project on animation seemed an obvious follow up.

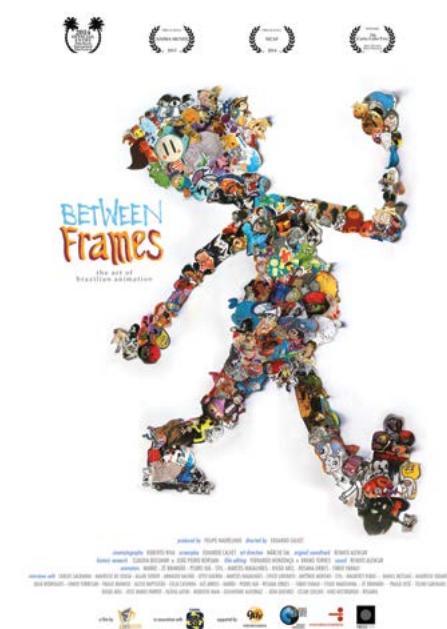
Taking four years to make, *Between Frames* uncovers a passion for animation in Brazilian artists that runs back nearly a hundred years to the nation's first animated film, *The Kaiser*. Made in 1917 by Alvaro Marins, who used the screen name Seth, no copy of *The Kaiser* is known to exist.

And while the film itself is gone, *Between Frames* captures at least some of its spirit as it chronicles the effort by a handful of modern Brazilian animators to recreate *The Kaiser* from the few surviving descriptions of its content.

"Starting with *The Kaiser*, we started to recover other stories, especially the early ones," Calvet said. The film features samples of work from such early Brazilian animators, such as Luis Seel, Roberto Miller, Stil and Mauricio da Sousa all the way up to modern animators like Carlos Saldanha.

"All of them were passionate animators," says Calvet. "They made basically animation their lives and they are not very well recognized here in Brazil, they are not famous people."

Many of the early animators were inspired by the works of – who else? – Walt Disney. One such animator was Anelio Latini Filho, whose *Amazon Symphony*, released in 1951, was the first animated feature film from Brazil. Made over five years – with almost all the work done by Latini himself – the film follows the style of Disney's *Fantasia*, telling



folk stories over orchestral music.

Haurelhuk says his biggest challenge was digging up historical material, locating animators and also finding copies of the animated movies themselves. Though the first steps were difficult, once found, most of the people they found were very



open and happy to talk about the work. "All the animators we interviewed were so nice, so gentle with us," he says.

The film, made for about \$35,000, covers other key outlets for animation – most notably advertising in the 1960s and 1970s, which offered the closest thing to an animation industry Brazil had in those days.

Many of the nation's animators were self-taught and pursued animation for the simple reason they loved it, says Calvet. But while animated characters were popular in ads and in entertainment, little attention was paid to who was doing it and why.

One of the few prior attempts to document Brazilian animation was a book on its history written by animator Antonio Moreno and published in the late 1970s. It was a precious resource for Calvet and Haurelhuk as they worked on the film.

"He's the one that knew about the newspapers that had *The Kaiser* information, he's the one that talked with the family of Alvaro Marins back in the '70s, so he's the one that kept this story alive," says Calvet. "Without Moreno's work, our work could have been done, but it was not going to be so good."

Having collected material from all over Brazil left the filmmakers with hundreds of hours of material to sort through. The recreation of *The Kaiser* short gave the movie's story a spine to form around.

The reaction to the movie, which has been screening at festivals, has been almost uniformly positive, Haurelhuk says. The movie has screened at the Palm Beach International Film Festival and is slated to screen at this year's Annecy festival.

That parallels the growing success of animation in Brazil, which, if it's not quite an industry, is at least setting the foundations will allow one to grow here.

"We don't have now a stable industry, but we are starting to build one," says Calvet. "We have a very strong festival in Brazil, Anima Mundi, that is growing every year. It makes a lot of young people enjoy animation, so we are starting to have a new generation of animators." ♦

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# Bienvenue à Annecy



While live-action rules at the celebrated Cannes event, the must-see French fete for the animation community is the **Annecy International Festival of Animated Film**. The artfully curated programs of features, shorts, TV specials and

more are complemented by the MIFA content market, insightful talks from celebrated filmmakers and more. In addition to trying to cram in as many of the competition films (nine features, 56 shorts, 30 TV movies, 36 commissioned films and 56 student shorts) as

possible, visitors can also take in first looks at the upcoming Disney short *Feast*, Pixar's ambitious feature *Inside Out* and TeamTO's *Yellow Bird*. Here is but an *amuse bouche* of what else you can find at the festival, set for June 9-14.

## The Big Nine

For a comprehensive look at the world animated movie scene, you can't miss the nine contestants chosen for the fest's feature film competition. The U.S. is being represented by indie icon Bill Plympton's crowdfunded seventh film *Cheatin'*, which opened the Holland Animation Film Festival in March. European offerings make up the bulk of the competition: *Minuscule - Valley of the Lost Ants* by Thomas Szabo and Hélène Giraud (France), *Lisa Limone and Maroc Orange: A Rapid Love Story* by Mait Laas (Estonia/Finland), *Last Hijack* by Femke Woltting and Tommy Pallotta (Germany/Belgium/Ireland/Netherlands) and *The Art of Happiness* by Alessandro Rak (Italy). They are joined by Sang-ho Yeon's *The Fake* (S. Korea), Mizuho Nishikubo's *Giovanni's Island* (Japan), Alê Abreu's *The Boy and the World* (Brazil) and *Asphalt Watches* from Shayne Ehman and Seth Scriver (Canada).



*The Art of Happiness*



## Stop ... Animation Time!

The 2014 fest is putting a special emphasis on one of the oldest (and most patience-trying) techniques of the art form, **stop-motion**. On offer are special programs celebrating various masters of the genre, works grouped by nation and must-see shorts as well as feature length films like Jiri



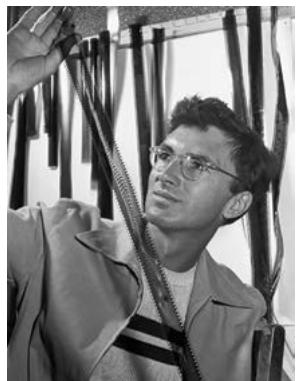
Trnka's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and the documentary *Ray Harryhausen: Special Effects Titan*. Aardman Animations' Peter Lord will make a presentation on the studio during the conference, and the magical open air screenings will include the studio's Oscar-winning *Wallace & Gromit: Curse of the Were-Rabbit* and Ladislav Starewitch's *The Tale of the Fox*.

*Curse of the Were-Rabbit* and Ladislav Starewitch's *The Tale of the Fox*.

## Celebrating Centennials

This year also marks two major 100-year anniversaries – one for animation lovers, and one for the world at large. Annecy will be marking a century since the birth of Canadian filmmaker **Norman McLaren** with a two-part shorts program meant to showcase how the artist's work has inspired others throughout the 20th century up to the present day, *McLaren Now: Dance* and *McLaren Now: Odd Birds*. *Now Dance* is end-capped by the director's *Begone Dull Care* and *Pas De Deux*; *Odd Birds* by *Blinkety Blank* and *Le Merle*.

Another duet of shorts programs will honor the 100-year anniversary of the onset of **World War I**. *Animate the Great War: The Horror of the Trenches* includes entries from far flung corners of the globe which explore the experiences of soldiers encountering modern warfare for the first time. The second raft of films, *The Hopes of the Armistice*, offer a wider lens with which to view the broader scope of the war and how it touched the lives of the people off the battlefield – unsurprisingly, this program is made entirely of French and Belgian entries. ♦



Norman McLaren

## Bow to the Master

This year, the festival organizers are bestowing the annual **Honorary Award** on legendary Japanese director, producer and Studio Ghibli co-founder **Isao Takahata**. Now in his late 70s, Takahata's name has become synonymous with the apex of Japanese animation over the course of his 50-plus year career. He is best known for directing the features *Pom Poko*, *My Neighbors the Yamadas* and *Grave of the Fireflies*. His most recent work, *The Tale of Princess Kaguya*, will be screened in his presence during the event. Annecy's artistic director Marcel Jean sums up global opinion on the great Takahata-san nicely: "A filmmaker of an exceptional scale, Mr. Takahata is also a great humanist whose work has become a reference for those who believe in the greatness of animation as a cinematic art form."



Isao Takahata

# A Big, Brainy Bash on the Bay

**2014 edition of Cartoons on the Bay elevated itself with outstanding programming in an idyllic setting. By Jean M. Thoren.**



The 2014 edition of Cartoons on the Bay convened this year in the historic city of Venice, a spectacular backdrop for the three-day event, which featured an ambitious schedule of tributes and panels.

Attendees of the presentations were surrounded by beautiful, mid-18th century frescoes painted by Tiepolo in Rai Trade's Palazzo Labia. The classic art gave the audience some historical perspective as they got a glimpse into the work of present-day animation masters Guillermo Mordillo and Aleksandr Petrov, along with lively discussions both practical and philosophical on animation production in Italy and around the world.

Russia, the guest country this year, was represented by Petrov, along with: Konstantin Bronzit of Studio Melnitsa; Ivan Maksimov, founder of Virtual Studio; Igor Kovalyov, one of the founders of Studio Pilot; and Vadim Sotskov, general director of KinoAtis. These iconic industry veterans are helping to drive Russia's thriving and growing animation industry.

One of Italy's best-known animators, Bruno Bozzetto, was feted in a discussion led by Federico Fieconi of Graffiti Media and Alfio Bastianich, president of ASIFA Italy. Bozzetto's 2013 trip to California to tour Pixar and Disney Studios was highlighted, along with his recent exhibition at The Walt Disney Family Museum in San Francisco.

The Italian Studio of the Year Award was presented to MAD Entertainment, which was founded in 2010 by Luciano Stella, Antonio Fresa and Luigi Scialdone. This award recognizes the creativity, tenacity and profes-

alism of this relative newcomer on the Italian multimedia scene.

Rounding out the Italian portion of the program was Luca Milano, vice director of Rai Fiction, who presented an ambitious slate of

Cyber Group is currently at work on the TV series *Zorro: The Chronicles*, featured in this issue of *Animation Magazine*.

On the technical front, Toon Boom Animation's Desideria Mastriaco and Federico Val-

larino teamed with Omar Ferreri of Clarity International and founder of Cappuccino Apps to demonstrate how Harmony caters to animators regardless of style or platform and successfully integrates with popular game engines.

Toon Boom sponsored Cartoons on the Bay's Pitch Me! award this year. First prize went to *Elementi Esperimenti*, by Sinne Mutters and Marco Bonini. Second place was awarded to *Blanco*, by Marco Farace and Benedetto Sicca, and *Power Nando - An Italian superhero in Moscow*, by Lorenzo Garbuglia placed third.

The three winning projects will receive a prize of a license for Toon Boom Storyboard Pro and Toon Boom Harmony. The winner in the first place will have the opportunity to make a teaser animated video in collaboration with Direct2Brain.

Living up to its history of diverse, thoughtful programming, the 2014 Cartoons on the Bay team was headed up this year by artistic director Roberto Genovesi. The event the challenge of offering to its audience of international guests some interesting and thought-provoking viewpoints and guidelines for navigating the universe of global animation production on all formats. We look forward to next year's 2015 edition and congratulate the 2014 award winning artists and studios.

**For a complete report on the Festival and the Pulcinella Awards visit [www.cartoonsbay.com](http://www.cartoonsbay.com).**



production for Rai Cartoons, in cooperation with major Italian production companies and animation studios.

Adding another feather to the cap of CEO Pierre Sissmann and his talented team, Cyber Group Studios from France was awarded International Studio of the Year. This nine-year-old studio has built a catalog of programs with more than a thousand hours of globally distributed programs for the youth and family market.

# Growing Pains

Russian animation production is booming thanks to government spending and strong demand while shorts dominate the creative end abroad. By Tom McLean.

**A**nimation has long been popular in Russia, where the first efforts at the art form date back to the time of the czars. The tumultuous history of animation production in Russia, however, has been on the upswing the past few years as government support and growing popularity of the art form have seen rapid growth – and a few growing pains.

The growth is easily told in the numbers. According to the Russian Animated Film Association, formed in 2012 to promote the growth of Russian animation, there are about 30 studios, the largest being Riki Production Centre and Melnitsa Studio.

In the feature realm, a handful of Russian-made features are released to theaters each year, achieving a modest level of success and bringing in growing of box office revenues.

Overall, box-office receipts have more than doubled over the past five years, fueled largely by successful releases from Melnitsa. Last year's *Three Heroes on Distant Shores*, the most-recent entry in Melnitsa's popular series, set a box-office record for an animated feature with an estimated \$31.5 million in ticket sales.

Several recent features have grossed in a mid-range of \$6 million to \$7.5 million, with some films at the lower end grossing in the \$1 million to \$2 million range.

Critical reception to Russian features has been mixed – within Russia, there appears to be an element of local pride involved. "People in Russia today go to theaters to watch Russian animated films more willingly than 15 years ago," says Konstantin Bronzit, a Melnitsa animator whose 2007 short film *Lavatory Lovestory* was nominated for an Oscar.

George Goloviznin, brand manager for Marmelad Media, Riki Group, says it's common for studios to have one established brand and he expects that to grow. "In the future, we expect that the company will have a portfolio of brands, and there will be a few key majors," he says. "Also in the future there will be tougher competition."

Other films have found markets abroad more successful, such as Wizart, whose fairy tale features like *The Snow Queen* and its sequel have done big business overseas. "One-hundred percent of our content is made for the international market, but it works in the Russian market as well," says Diana Yurinova, head



*Three Heroes on Distant Shores*

of international distribution.

As the number of films has grown, so too has production budgets. RAFA says budgets have nearly doubled in the past five years – much of it coming straight from the government. In recent years, around \$25 million has been allocated to Russian studios, with slightly more than half going to features and the rest to debut animations, shorts and series.

"Without this support, Russian cinema would be dead," says Bronzit.

Private investments do exist, though the numbers are less clear. RAFA places it at anywhere from 35 percent to 50 percent of animated budgets. Private funding is harder to come by for the artistic shorts.

Television animation also has seen robust growth, with about 15 Russian animation series – mostly aimed at children – beaming to the nation's televisions, up from about five in 2008. Among them are: *The Pooshers* (Melnitsa Studio), *Space Dogs Family* (Kinoatis Studio), *Lucky* (Metronomfilm Studio), *Qumi Qumi* (Toonbox Studio), *Flying Animals* (Da Studio), *Masha and the Bear* (Animaccord Studio) and *Kikoriki* (SKA St. Petersburg).

Russia's more artistic animators and shorts continue to be well-regarded and celebrated, as at the just-concluded Cartoons on the Bay festival in Venice. Among the guests was Leonid Shmelkov, whose short film *My Own*



*Kikoriki*

*Personal Moose* was among the fest's nominated films. "The audience for my films is larger in foreign countries," he says. "Because the network of short film and animation festivals is more developed, there are more distributors of short films."

He describes Russian animation as a tad insular. "From one side, it is good: We have our own traditions!" he says. "But from the other side, each year I see Russian films that could have been made 20, 30 or 40 years ago."

While the industry is growing thanks to government funding, those quality issues remain a concern especially as the Russian fare increasingly has to compete with movies made by more experienced filmmakers abroad. Some studios, like Wizart, train their own animators and, when needed, hire freelancers from abroad, says Wizart producer Yuri Moskvin.

Shmelkov says he expects the talent pool to grow. "It seems, if everything goes in the right direction, our commercial animation will be much better," he says. ♦

# RUSSIAN ANIMATION

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**Three Heroes on Distant Shores**  
Adventure, 71' STV Film Company,  
Animation Studio "Melnitsa"



**Space Dogs 2. Moon adventures**  
Adventure, comedy, 72' KinoAtis, LLC  
(CIS countries), Epic Pictures Group (world  
distributor)



**Ku! Kin-dza-dza**  
Comedy, 90' STV Film Company,  
Animation Studio "Melnitsa"



**Kikoriki: Legend  
of the Golden Dragon**  
Adventure-comedy, family, 87'  
SMESHARIKI, LLC



**The Magic Tower**  
Historical fantasy, 80'  
"MASTER-FILM" STUDIO



**The Snow King (The Snow Queen II)**  
Adventure, fantasy, family, 80'  
Bazelevs distribution



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## Finland Flourishes

Nordic nation's animation blossoms on the international stage as the nation celebrates a hundred years since its first use of the art form. By Peter Schavemaker.

**F**inland's rising animation industry has a lot to celebrate – not only has it reached worldwide success with hits such as *Angry Birds*, but the nation is celebrating in 2014 the centennial of its first animated film.

Several events are planned through the year for the centennial, the date for which is based on a film by Eric Vasström that, unfortunately, no longer exists.

"Vasström has the honor to be the first, but we have not seen his animation work," says author Tuula Leinonen, author of a book on the Finnish animation centennial to be published this summer. "His 1914 film (title unknown) and images sadly have been destroyed."

Vasström is considered one of the pioneers of Finnish animation, along with Hjalmar Löfving, whose work has fared better. "He was a productive guy and knew how to animate. In 1932 he independently produced the famous animation *Muutama metri tuulta ja sadetta* (*A Few Meters in Wind and Rain*)," says Leinonen.

Despite those early efforts, the first serious steps forward came in the 1970s, when Finnish broadcaster YLE built an animation studio that produced distinctive stop-motion puppet

and cutout animation. That style, inspired by Finland's renowned design aesthetic, came to define Finnish animation through the work of animators like Heikki Partanen and his wife, Riitta Rautoma.

With *Seitsemän Veljestä* (*Seven Brothers*) in 1979, Finland's first animated feature was released, made using watercolor, by artist Riitta Nelimarkka. Nelimarkka says she was inspired by the

watercolor and cutout techniques used in Stockholm, Sweden, where she studied animation from 1967. Nelimarkka worked almost four years on the film, with only six people helping. Based on a well-known novel, the film won multiple awards and established Nelimarkka as a national treasure – a designation she downplays.

This also can be said about Kateriina Lillqvist, "The Grand Old Lady" of Finnish animation. Lil-



Iqvist's groundbreaking puppet films, some based on Franz Kafka's writings, touched on politics, philosophy, multiculturalism, tolerance and racism as main subjects. Her most famous film, *Maalaisläkäri* (*The Country Doctor*), is about refugees from the Sarajevo war and it won the Silver Bear at the 2006 Berlin Film Festival. "I wanted to tell their stories," she said. "The Silver Bear felt as a true recognition, opposite to the criticism many people expressed."

The celebration of the Finnish animation centennial also marks the 100th birthday of one of the country's best-loved figures, Tove Jansson, who created the iconic Moomins in the 1940s. The Moomins have become Finland's best-known animation characters, and also have become popular in Japan. "Finnish and Japanese people like to live quiet, peaceful and care about the environment," says Leinonen. "The gentle and timeless Moomins world is built on these values."

The Moomins have starred in three feature films, the first of which – *Comet in Moominland* – was made in 1992 using Japanese animation and altered the look of the characters significantly. "The Moomins were looking completely different. Tove Jansson was horrified by it," Leinonen says. In 2008, *Moomin and Midsummer Madness* was released, followed in 2010 by *Moomins and the Comet Chase* (*Muumi ja punainen pyrstötähti*), Finland's first stereoscopic film.

The Moomins will return to the big screen for the centennial celebration, with the October release of the feature *Moomins on the Riviera*. Co-produced by Paris-based Pictak and Finland's Handle Productions, the film has a budget of about \$4.9 million. "The film will shed new light on the original black and white Moomins stories, used in the script, from Tove Jansson's books and comic strips published in the '50s," says Handle Productions owner Hanna Hemilä.

Handle worked on a number of productions in the 1990s that advanced Finnish animation through collaboration with more advanced local nations like Estonia. A puppetmaker on one such project was Kari Juusonen, who has become one of the pillars of modern Finnish animation after his short film *Pizza Passionata* won an award at the Cannes Film Festival. Juusonen next co-directed the feature *Niko Lentäjän poika* (*Niko: The Way to the Stars*) in 2008 and *Niko 2: Little Brother, Big Trouble* in 2012, two of Finland's most popular animated fea-

tures ever. In 2013, Juusonen made a surprising artistic change by going to Finland's leading entertainment company, Rovio, where he is directing the TV series *Angry Birds Toons*.

Both *Niko* films were produced by Anima Vitae, currently Finland's leading animation studio. Mikael Hed, CEO of Rovio, says that talent-wise, Anima Vitae can be compared to Pixar. "I think they are awesome. They have done some incredible stuff. I have nothing but respect from them."

Anima Vitae and Rovio co-operate on the *Angry Birds* animated series. Anima Vitae CEO Petteri Pasanen, who produced Juusonen's *Pizza Passionata*, says: "Technical people from Pixar have visited us three times, and they were amazed how we – as a small studio in Finland – achieved our projects."

Pasanen says the success of the *Niko* films opened doors for Finnish animation. "It brought awareness, although not everybody directly recognizes *Niko* is a Finnish animation project," he says. "In the U.S., we are considered a U.S.-friendly company. It feels like a foot in the door. That makes it easier to work on new productions. I don't have to explain who we are anymore."

Anima Vitae is trying to get a foot in the door in Asia, too. The company opened an office in Kuala Lumpur, and is working on partnerships with Malaysian, Chinese, Korean and Australian studios.

Anima Vitae is producing – with Danish Einstein Film – a feature film called *HUGO*, about the Nordic troll character, for delivery in 2016. "*HUGO* has the same international appeal as *Niko*," Passanen says.

Without a doubt, *Angry Birds* is Finland's most successful animation export and Rovio its largest entertainment company. The game reached 2 billion downloads since its introduction in 2010 and a dialogue-free animated series released in 2013 saw more than 1 billion views in its first seven months. An animated feature is now in production, due out July 1, 2016, Made with Sony, the animation is being done at the Imageworks studio in Vancouver.

Hed says Rovio chose not to build their own animation studio in Finland. "That would have taken too long."

Guaglione says his main goal is to take the Rovio storytelling culture to a higher level.

"We like to expand the characters of *Angry*



Birds, from the gaming atmosphere to an animation-based level and dimension our fans have never seen or experienced. Currently, we are developing new properties and animation styles beyond *Angry Birds*. It doesn't stop with *Angry Birds*."

The recently released character *Stella* is a first example of the new approach, according to Guaglione.

Co-productions have further spread Finnish animation around the world. The best example of a Finnish international coproduction is the Finnish/Chinese TV series *Dibidogs*, produced by Finland's Futurecode, owned by Jim Solatje; and China's Blue Arc, owned by Tommy Wang. The men met in 2007, a year after the Solatje family created the *Dibidogs* characters.

"We travelled to China 50 times to find the right partners," says Solatje.

Premiering in Finland in 2010, the show airs nationwide in China on CCTV and has deals to air in Russia and Korea. *Dibidogs* is also broadcast in countries like Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia. Solatje says the victory march is not ended.

"We are having talks with main channels in Southern Europe and will soon launch the unique *DibiTales* app, where children can create their own stories and animate them. I hope *Dibidogs* will be the next *Angry Birds*." ♦



*Seven Brothers*



*Niko: The Way to the Stars*

A TV series version of Tove Jansson's Moomins.



# MPC Adds Menace to X-Men's Sentinels

**E**ver since Marvel's mutants debuted on the big screen 14 years ago, fans have been waiting for a glimpse of one of their most implacable foes: the Sentinels. By Tom McLean.

**W**ith the release May 23 of Fox's *X-Men: Days of Future Past*, those fans finally have their wish. Based on a classic storyline from 1980, the movie draws together the events of both the original trilogy and the 2011 prequel *X-Men: First Class* into a time travel epic that sees the mutants of the future try to change history in an attempt to save the future from the Sentinels' disastrous rule.

Bringing the future Sentinels to life was tasked to MPC and animation supervisor Benoit Dubuc, working from the company's Montreal studio. A fan of the comic book, Dubuc was charged with developing the personality and behavior of the future Sentinels.

"The idea is that they're developed with bio tech as opposed to the past ones, which were more mechanical," he says.

"We had to find the line, the balance of having them still retain that sort of mechanical, robotic feel, but also be extremely agile and nimble and athletic."

In the comics, the Sentinels are huge robots charged with protecting humans from the perceived mutant menace, either by capturing or killing them. The future Sentinels are noticeably smaller than the comic book versions, standing about 18 feet tall, and have a few extra abilities.

"They can morph and they can absorb the powers of the mutants and then replicate them," he says.

The end result is one *X-Men* fan Dubuc is proud of. "These projects are what animators love, working on big robots," he says. "The Sentinels were really fun and really challenging for us to make it work and make it menacing was a great experience." ♦



## Obeying Gravity

**A**nimators learn the physics of being a superhero for *Amazing Spider-Man 2*. By Tom McLean.

**F**or *The Amazing Spider-Man 2*, which reunites director Marc Webb with stars Andrew Garfield and Emma Stone and opened May 2, animation supervisor Dave Schaub says the real challenge with the character from an animation perspective was to make him move as real as possible by applying real-world physics to every shot.

Proper application of gravity is the best example, says Schaub, who works at Sony Pictures Imageworks. "We've been really hell-bent on making the physics right, so if he's swinging on the web and he releases, he doesn't have a Wile E. Coyote moment – he's not flying – gravity needs to kick in and, when it does, it's a really specific acceleration defined by physics."

Schaub says the team on this movie would use simulations in a program they called "Doctor Gravity" to check the physics. But educating animators is the most effective way to get good results. As such, he runs a class called "Physics for Animators" that eschews a lot of math for a more visual approach.

But physics alone isn't always enough for a superhero, who has to look good as he swings and fights his way through the city. "We want to make sure that every frame has an interesting-looking pose and that everything about it looks like Spider-Man and that any frame you grab could ideally be a movie poster," he says.

Those poses can't be hit gratuitously, though, and the animators referred frequently to extensive

footage shot of stunt performer William Spencer doing Spider-Man moves on wires.

For Electro, whose body glows with a swarm of electric energy, all the close-up shots were based on actor Jamie Foxx's performance. "We did a soft track on his face so that it's really the Jamie Foxx photography for all the close up work and then animators literally tracked to a high level of finesse the movement of the face, so that when effects were applied downstream we'd get the skin and all the vein detail on the surface – and under the surface as well – so that stuff was sliding over the internal structure." That took a team of animators working around the clock to get done accurately enough that the effects' teams work on the glow and electricity would be properly registered.

The Green Goblin also had a CG double that turned out so well that director Webb was able to cut from footage of actor Dane DeHaan in costume to the digital version without it being in any way noticeable, says Schaub. The Rhino was a character whose design changed through the process of trying to animate it, Schaub says. "We realized we needed to make the legs more substantial and just kind of massaged the design into being through a process of animation and ended up with something Marc really liked."

*This article first appeared in longer form online at [www.animationmagazine.net](http://www.animationmagazine.net)* ♦

# Disney's Creature Feature

Digital pixies, dragons and more were required for *Maleficent's* move to live action. By Ellen Wolff.

**T**he source material may be Disney's animated classic *Sleeping Beauty*, but *Maleficent* lives in the land of visual effects.

That's not surprising, given that first-time director Robert Stromberg is an effects expert – with Oscars for his art direction on *Alice in Wonderland* and *Avatar*. In *Maleficent*, Stromberg takes title star Angelina Jolie through heavily stylized landscapes, surrounded by a cast of virtual performers that range from flying pixies to a fire-breathing dragon.

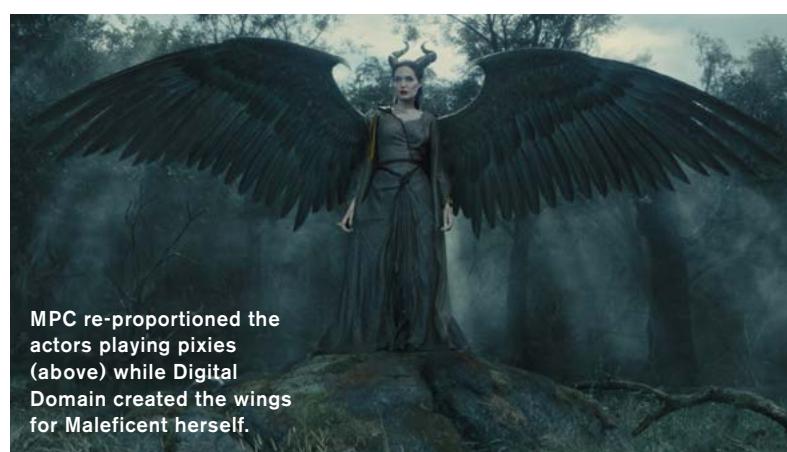
"The biggest challenge was to make these characters seem believable within the film's fanciful environments," says visual-effects supervisor Carey Villegas. A visual-effects Oscar nominee for *Alice in Wonderland*, Villegas collaborated with Stromberg in "casting" the houses handling the animation. "We needed large companies for a film which has so many characters occupying the same sequences," Villegas says. "They needed to share assets or have similar pipelines. That led to a good fit between Digital Domain and the Moving Picture Company."

Villegas had worked previously at Digital Domain and knew how the studio's facial-animation capabilities had advanced since *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*. That would be crucial to transforming the human performances that drive the film's two-foot-tall pixie characters, which Stromberg envisioned as buzzing like hummingbirds.

"We did a full performance capture of the actors in flying rigs," says Digital Domain visual-effects supervisor Darren Hendler. "From that, we got a moving skeleton that we re-proportioned to their pixie bodies. We'd also captured markers on the actors' faces and calculated them in 3D space as a moving point cloud. Then we did a facial solver, where we took those moving points and applied them to the facial rig that the animators would later use. For every single frame, our facial solver calculated the expression we needed to have on our facial rig to match what the actor was doing."

"That solver is definitely a proprietary tool," says Digital Domain CG supervisor Jonathan Litt. The system allowed the studio's Maya animators to dial in expressions and see the results in nearly real time.

To create the characters' flowing tresses



MPC re-proportioned the actors playing pixies (above) while Digital Domain created the wings for Maleficent herself.

and layered costumes, Litt says Digital Domain used its proprietary Samson grooming tool. "These were the most complex humanoids we've ever done. We used a new generation of Samson, which is almost like Nuke for hair."

The rest of the effects work in *Maleficent*, which Villegas estimates totaled 1,500 shots, featured keyframe animation. Villegas tapped Digital Domain to animate digital doubles of Maleficent and to generate her huge, CG wings. In preparation, Jolie was scanned at the Institute of Creative Technologies at USC. But Maleficent's wings couldn't just react to what her body was doing. As Hendler explains: "Robert Stromberg's mandate was that her wings had to have a personality of their own. If Maleficent was sad, we needed to read that in

her wings. Every feather was modeled individually."

The ebony feathers of the raven Diaval, Maleficent's compatriot, also presented a challenge to the Motion Picture Company. "Black feathers are almost all specular, and really hard to make convincing," says MPC visual-effects supervisor Adam Valdez. "They gave him a sheen that was tricky to control."

Valdez's lead team in London shared this animation with MPC visual-effects supervisor Seth Maury's team in Vancouver. As Valdez explains, "MPC London was able to build creatures, do character test animations, establish the lookdev of those assets, and hand them to the Vancouver team. Some of the best raven animation was done there."

Adding to the degree of difficulty was that Diaval was a shape-shifter, transforming from a raven to a man, a horse, a wolf and ultimately a monstrous dragon. "We received some really cool designs and commenced ZBrush sculpts to find his form," Valdez says. "Dragons have been done so much. The issue was to do one that's fresh. The main challenge was animation – how to put this giant dragon into a cramped space; create a sense of tension and make the audience believe he can't simply overwhelm the soldiers he's fighting."

MPC created scores of digital soldiers for *Maleficent* by using its crowd tool, Alice. They handled their characters' hair grooming with their proprietary tool, Furtility. MPC also animated a battle that features creatures made from roots and bark. As Villegas says, "They look like they're made out of trees intertwined."

The interaction of so many virtual characters was a key concern for Villegas. "It had to be strategically thought out so we could have Maleficent's doubles from Digital Domain interacting with soldiers from MPC. That took some extra doing." Villegas himself led an internal VFX team in Los Angeles that handled a few hundred shots.

Even by comparison to the big visual-effects shows that Villegas has done in the past, he considers *Maleficent* a huge undertaking. "Over 2,100 people from the visual effects world worked on this film." ♦



# Building a Better *Godzilla*

**Effects crew emphasizes the drama in the classic monster design for director Gareth Edwards' reboot of Japan's most famous feature creature.** By Bill Desowitz.

**D**irector Gareth Edwards' transition from the low-budget indie *Monsters* to the *Godzilla* reboot had more to do with scaling up than modifying his classical storytelling ability. Taking cues from Steven Spielberg (*Jaws* and *Jurassic Park*) as well as gritty docs, he wanted his version of Toho's famous Kaiju to be believable, versatile and, dare we say, even heroic.

It was all part of staying true to the Toho original yet also being socially relevant for our times: "We police the world and tell everyone else not to have nuclear weapons and what if the tables were turned with a creature that feeds off radiation," says Edwards, who called the movie a one-stop shop for monster mayhem, only with a humanizing twist.

Edwards, whose first exposure to *Godzilla* as a youngster in the United Kingdom was actually Hanna-Barbera's *Godzuki* cartoon series, enjoyed opening up a Pandora's Box while not overplaying his hand too early with spectacle.

"Animals are very bad storytellers, so we ended up dialing in a lot more human performance and he went incrementally from being totally animalistic to a lot more like a guy in a suit doing the performance, because you needed to understand in his body language whether he's tired or angry."

This meant that the first photo-real, CG monster had to be graphically arresting as well as powerful. Therefore, MPC, under the overall VFX supervision of Oscar-winning Guillaume Rocheron (*Life of Pi*), faced its most daunting animation challenge. The London house worked with Edwards for seven months bringing *Godzilla* to life, making it ready for shot production. New in-house tools were devel-

oped to create skin and muscles. An extremely high level of detail was used by MPC's artists due to the close-up nature of the camera work on the 350-foot creature, particularly in texture. VFX Supervisor Nicolas Aithadi also worked with Edwards on design, previz and the first Comic-Con trailer where you see *Godzilla* emerge from the dust and rubble.

Designing *Godzilla* and then defining his performance was, of course, the centerpiece of the movie. The way Edwards plays the man vs. nature theme is like a thriller, teasing shots early on and building suspense before the full reveal and not overplaying the spectacle.

"We found that it was always efficient graphically to show the spikes on his spine," Rocheron explains. "And when *Godzilla* looked toward the camera, we would pose him so he looked slightly down. You get that fairly aggressive feeling but, at the same time, we would position the back and the spikes so you would get that kind of Mohawk. If you look at him up close, you can see all of *Godzilla*'s expressions but further away you see him more as a silhouette that's very graphic."

By framing *Godzilla* primarily in silhouette (shot by cinematographer Seamus McGarvey), the experience is more intense. "We were using background environments and patches of light and fire to help shape the image as a strong composition," Rocheron says.

*Godzilla* is a giant lizard. But lizards don't emote, so they studied bears and other predatory creatures, relying on realistic body language, subtle facial detail and breathing to propel the performance. *Godzilla* expresses anger, sadness and triumph. "We spent a lot of time lighting *Godzilla* and (his combatants, the MUTOS) so they registered clearly," Rocheron says.

"It took six months to sculpt him and get the right proportions, and then making sure we had a muscle layer and on top of that a fat layer. We were simulating many different kinds of skin because if you look across *Godzilla*'s body, it's covered with around 10 different types of skin thicknesses."

MPC used Maya as the base software along with ZBrush for modeling, Mari for texturing and Kali (its proprietary destruction simulation tool) through the Katana lighting interface. In fact, Kali was upgraded and given a number of significant incremental improvements to make photo-real destruction.

In addition, all of the muscle and skin sliding tools were plug-ins done in-house to customize the work, "and making sure we could pipeline and streamline that. These are heavy assets to simulate and to render. It takes between eight and 12 hours just to compute all the dynamics of the muscles and the fat and the skin."

As for the MUTOS, they were original monster designs. In sharp contrast to *Godzilla*, they are simple, slick and black. "They are almost like insects, which is what Gareth wanted to stay away from. We actually used bats as reference for the wings. They are made of sharp lines and angles, and skin that is whale-like. But as soon as they started integrating shots into the movie they started to lose some of the strong graphic quality through the blackness. So we had to do quite a bit of shot development to adjust features and length so they registered better."

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**Bill Desowitz runs *Immersed in Movies* ([www.bill-desowitz.com](http://www.bill-desowitz.com)) and is the author of *James Bond Unmasked* ([www.jamesbondunmasked.com](http://www.jamesbondunmasked.com)), now available on Kindle with a new *Skyfall* chapter.**

## Tech Reviews

by Todd Sheridan Perry



### Chaos V-Ray 3.0 for 3ds Max

There is no way that I'm going to be able to fit all the features in V-Ray 3.0. Is it enough to say that, out of the box, it's easier to get started with basic, advanced and expert modes, showing the appropriate dials for the appropriate user? Or quick settings to get to the optimal settings for your scene and reduce the sliders to just what you need? Or that it seems to be running about 30 percent to 40 percent faster? Probably not. Even though, for me, that would be reason enough to upgrade. So, here we go with the V-Ray 3.0 laundry list.

V-Ray has a progressive setting, which is like V-Ray RT on Adderall. It kicks up RT functionality by adhering to the path tracing of the production renderer so that all the features – like volume, SSS and irradiance – can be used to quickly and more accurately iterate lighting so that you reach your goals faster.

The frame buffer has new tools for controlling color, but most importantly the ability to load in color profiles like ColorLO, icc and 3D LUTs to accurately represent how the image will look with the production LUTs applied. Again, it provides you with tools to get your renders just that much closer to final before it goes to comp.

Render masks allow you to render just certain objects, along with the appropriate alphas, without having to change states or matte settings.

The hair shader is optimized, and sub-surface scattering can use ray-tracing, eliminating pre-pass calculations while increasing detail.

A Max Ray Intensity dial is hidden within the advanced and expert modes, which aides in eliminating sparkles that happen in the render when using extremely bright light sources that are frequently found in HDR images. This is huge. Huge!

And now VRMats, previously named Vismats, are usable as universal shaders that can be ported back and forth between V-Ray for different host systems. Shaders are available on the Chaos site, but can then be customized, and exported out as new shaders to be used in Max, Maya, C4D, Rhino and SketchUp.

Everything here is absolutely worth upgrading to 3.0. The only downside? It's not available for Maya ... yet.



### Deadline 6.1

I've been working with – and loving – Deadline for years now. And ever since version 5, when they revamped the whole workflows and extended it to multiple platforms, I've loved it even more. Now, with version 6.1, the new features make it even more attractive.

The largest step in the latest, at least for me, is the job dependency view. Well, let's back up for a second to talk about dependencies. Deadline will now wait to start jobs if something it needs is missing. So, it will hold off until a cache is finished writing, or a texture is created or rendered, or if a Python script returns true.

Now, the job dependency view shows all of these connections in a node-based window – just like Nuke, Houdini, Thinking Particles, Magica or any other powerful piece of software. It only makes sense to view your render submissions in this way. And, it's not just viewing. You are able to connect, disconnect and manipulate the dependencies within the graph, making management much easier to follow ... especially if you have multiple jobs waiting for similar assets.

Additionally, if you are working with 3ds Max, you can take advantage of advanced multiregion rendering and auto-assembly of single images rendered across the farm. Not only do you have arbitrary, savable areas, which can be manually set, or shrink wrapped to an object, but if you want to render across an animation, that region can be set to track the object you wish to isolate. Pretty darn handy – and I hear Maya will be coming soon for this. But in the meantime, Deadline still supports distributed bucket rendering for Maya V-Ray as well as Arnold region rendering.

For those of you who like to get under the hood, you can use the Native Python API to talk to Deadline directly without having to call the Deadline command app – seriously beneficial for those who need to tailor Deadline to their own pipeline.

As always, it's a pretty UI with an intuitive approach, supported by a robust foundation. Some hardcore Linux and OSX guys may take umbrage with the bits of Windows NET legacy methodology but for the majority of us out there it just works.

### Dell M3800 Mobile Workstation

Ever since Michael Dell pulled the company reins away from stockholders and back into private ownership, there seems to have been a push to increase innovation while also making sure not to leave us professionals behind. From consumer desktops to Precision Workstations to 4K monitors, Dell wants to satisfy everyone. And this is what brings me to the M3800 Mobile Workstation.

At 4.6 pounds, the M3800 is pretty much the thinnest, lightest "laptop" in its class (being beat out by 0.1 pounds by the MacBook Pro). The body is single molds of aluminum with carbon fiber, making it not only light, but pretty to look at. However, it makes it more vulnerable to bumps and bruises. So, don't throw it.

The interior is a 2.2-GHz Intel i7 processor with 16 GB of RAM and a 512-GB solid-state hard drive, so there is enough punch to get most mid-level animation, editing or visual-effects work accomplished. Aside from the foundation guts, the joy inside is the NVIDIA Quadro K1100 pushing the 15.6-inch display up to 3,200 x 1,800 dpi – a resolution so high that I had to drop it just to make the touch-screen usable.

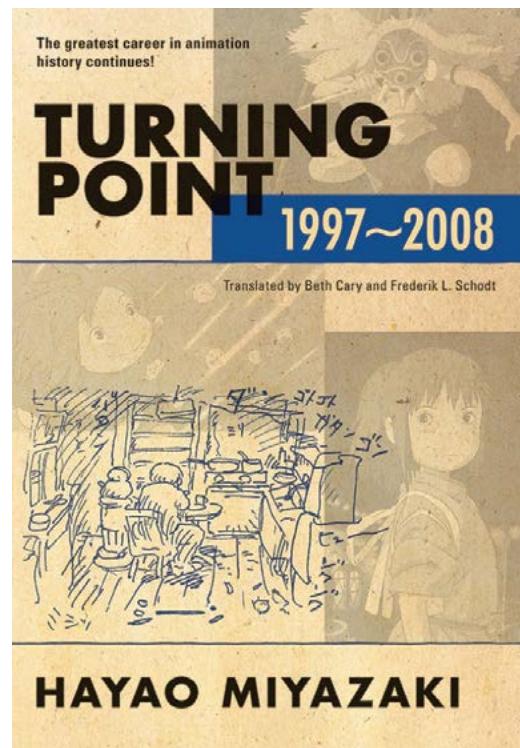
Despite pushing the system with some pretty heavy-duty calculations, it miraculously stayed cool enough to work with it on my lap, and the palm rests and touchpad seemed to heat up not at all.

While the M3800 may not have as much oomph as its bigger brother, the 4800, or the competing HP ZBook, the power-to-size ratio is a huge selling point. If you are frequently working on-set or on the road, I would seriously consider the Dell. Your back will thank you. That being said, if you find yourself in the field, on location, or otherwise rugged territory, go with the 4800 or the HP ZBook. The M3800 is a little sports car with a lot of horses – not a 4 x 4 truck. It deserves to be kept clean and shiny. ♦



# The Mature Miyazaki

Collection of acclaimed animator's words offers deeper insight into the man behind the magic. By Charles Solomon.



## **Turning Point: 1997-2008**

By Hayao Miyazaki, translated by Beth Cary and Frederik L. Schodt  
VIZ: \$29.99; 452 pp., illustrated

**T**urning Point: 1997-2008 is a collection of interviews, articles, speeches and poems by Hayao Miyazaki from the years when he made some of his most mature films: *Princess Mononoke* (1997), *Spirited Away* (2001) and *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004).

Miyazaki doesn't offer a genial tour of his career and ideas, as Chuck Jones did in *Chuck Amuck* or Ed Catmull in *Creativity, Inc.* He follows his interests where they take him, from a proposal for a short film for the Ghibli Museum to what he thinks Japanese schools are doing wrong, to the mistaken views many people hold about the natural world. It's difficult to imagine an American director, even one as gentle as Pete Docter, writing poems about the characters in his films, yet Miyazaki writes of Ashitaka, the hero of *Princess Mononoke*: "Though cruel fate toyed with him / How deeply he loved people and the forest ... / How clear were his eyes."

When he focuses on books and films that have inspired him, Miyazaki cites two features American readers are unlikely to have seen: *Tale of the White Snake* (sometimes referred to as *Panda and the Magic Serpent*) by Taiji Yabushita (1958) and Lev Atamanov's adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen's *The Snow Queen* (1957). He notes Atamanov's emphasis on Gerda's dream of rescuing her beloved Kai from the clutches of the title char-

acter, adding, "... from a young age I had always thought that the medium of animation was particularly suited to depicting that dream." *The Snow Queen* made him glad he had become an animator: "Up until that point, I had just been punching a time card at work every day, wondering if I should do something more with my life."

Miyazaki's literary tastes are eclectic. He praises the juvenile novels of British author Robert Westall, and wrote and drew a design for the wrapping of a re-issue of three books by novelist Yoshie Hotta. Not surprisingly, he treats the work of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry with special warmth. No one described the pilot's mentality with comparable poetic elegance, and Miyazaki has incorporated his fascination with flight into virtually all his films. He retraced the mail route in Saint-Exupéry's memoir *Wind, Sand and Stars*, from Toulouse to Cap Juby, Morocco, in a vintage airplane, savoring the link to a book he clearly loves.

During this time, Miyazaki also planned the Ghibli Museum in Mitaka, which opened in 2002. He did not want to create an "arrogant museum" that "treats its contents as if they were more important than people," but a space where "... visitors can enjoy just by looking, can understand the artists' spirits, and can gain new insights into animation." He succeeded.

Miyazaki has frequently said he dislikes be-

ing interviewed. Like Bill Watterson, the reclusive creator of *Calvin and Hobbes*, he prefers to make brilliant works of art and be left alone – an attitude that seems almost subversive in today's self-promoting media culture. But the mutual respect and affection between Miyazaki and British stop-motion director Nick Park is almost palpable in a long discussion held at the 18th Tokyo International Film Festival in 2005. (An Aardman exhibit was held at the Ghibli Museum in 2006-2007.)

Some of the subjects that engage Miyazaki's attention will be unfamiliar to American readers. He reflects on how humans have changed the landscapes and forests of Japan. At an exhibit of recently excavated objects from a Jomon era village (c. 12,000 to c. 300 B.C.E.), he speculates about the lives of the people who inhabited it, which leads to a series of vivid watercolor sketches.

The lively translation by Beth Cary and Frederik L. Schodt effectively captures the tone of Miyazaki's speech. A companion volume to *Starting Point: 1979-1996*, *Turning Point: 1997-2008* belongs in the library of any serious animator, animation student or fan, along with the volumes of Miyazaki's storyboards.

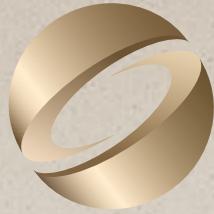
However, in an interview conducted in 1998, Miyazaki commented sardonically, "We animators are involved in this occupation because we have things that we left undone in our childhood. Those who enjoyed their childhood to the fullest don't go into this line of work. Those who fully graduated from their childhood leave it behind." ♦

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# Early Summer DVD Refreshers

Kick back with indie darling *Ernest & Celestine*, a Hellboy double feature, Marvel Knights and *Bob's Burgers*. By Mercedes Milligan.

## **Ernest & Celestine**

[\$34.95, New Video Group]

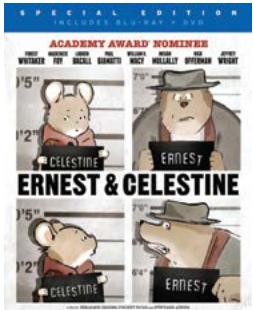
While this painterly 2D adaptation of Daniel Pennac's charming kids tale was edged out by *Frozen* in the Oscar race, racking up honors from the Cesars, Cannes, Magritte and L.A. events is none too shabby. Thanks to GKIDS, North American audiences got to enjoy this acclaimed film in theaters, and now's your

chance to bring the heartwarming animal adventure home.

Directed by Stephane Aubier, Vincent Patar (the duo behind *A Town Called Panic*) and first timer Benjamin Renner, the film centers on a young mouse who wants to be an artist, and the down-on-his-luck bear musician who spares her — and how the rest of the world deals with their unusual friendship. In addition

to the beautiful animation from La Parti Productions and Les Armateurs and the phenomenal English dub cast (Forest Whitaker, Mackenzie Foy, Lauren Bacall, Paul Giamatti, William H. Macy, Megan Mullally, Nick Offerman, Jeffrey Wright), the two-disc Blu-ray/DVD combo pack also boasts a *tres magnifique* 50-minute making-of featurette.

[Release date: June 17]



## **20 Years of Hellboy**

[\$17.99, Anchor Bay]

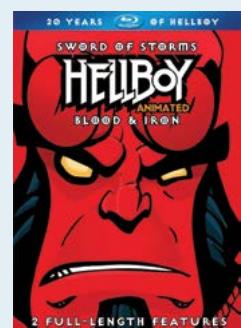
Celebrate 20 years of Mike Mignola's seminal graphic novel anti-hero Hellboy with this Blu-ray double feature of the animated flicks *Blood & Iron* and *Sword of Storms*. This limited edition release also comes with an exclusive mini comic detailing the full story of The Chapel of Moloch.

*Storm of Swords*, directed by

Tad Stones under the guidance of producers Mignola and Guillermo Del Toro, finds Hellboy (voiced by Ron Perlman) flung into a supernatural ghost dimension by a cursed samurai sword while investigating a folklore professor's demonic possession — and it doesn't help that pyrokinetic Liz (Selma Blair) and fishboy Abe Sapien (Doug Jones) have their hands full with a very angry dragon. For *Blood*

& Iron, Stones is joined by veteran TV director Victor Cook, and takes Hellboy and company on a wild tour of a haunted mansion to uncover a plot to resurrect a beautiful but monstrous vampire. Oh, and they have to fight off a few harpies, a werewolf and an evil goddess along the way. Cheers to the big 2-0, you glorious red bastard!

[Release date: May 13]



## **Marvel Knights Wolverine Weapon X: Tomorrow Dies Today**

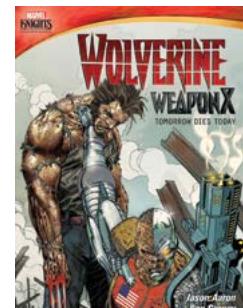
[\$14.98, Shout! Factory]

Marvel's richly graphic Marvel Knights Animation world offers up an adrenaline pumping new motion comic adventure with *Tomorrow Dies Today*. Crafted by Eisner Award nominees Jason Aaron (*Thor: God*

of Thunder) and artist Ron Garney (*Hulk*, *The Amazing Spider-Man*), Wolverine's latest escapade is set in a dismal future controlled by an evil mega-corporation called Roxxon, which keeps its iron grip on society with cyborg enforcers called Deathlok who hunt down current — and future — rebels. In order to prevent the upcoming slaughter of the

world's heroes, Wolverine must team up with a mysterious woman with unexplained knowledge of the future catastrophe. The DVD's 66-minute actioner is complemented by a making-of featurette to give a closer look at the new breed of Deathlok.

[Release date: May 13]



## **Bob's Burgers: The Complete 3rd Season**

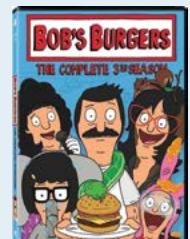
[\$29.95, Fox]

Loren Bouchard's barely functional (but oh so lovable) grill-tending family the Belchers just wrapped up their fourth season on Fox's Animation

Domination, so now's the perfect time to take a trip down memory lane with this three disc, third season collection. In addition to the usual bungles of the family — voiced by comedians H.Jon Benjamin, John Roberts, Dan Mintz, Eugene Mirman and Kristen Schaal — among the 23 episodes which

ran from 2012-13 on this DVD set are gems like "Ear-sy Rider," "Nude Beach," *E.T.* spoof "O.T.: The Outside Toilet" and the magical/disturbing holiday special "God Rest Ye Merry Gentle-Mannequins."

[Release date: May 13]



## **Honorable Mentions:**

**Dragons: Defenders of Berk - Part 2** [May 27, \$19.98]

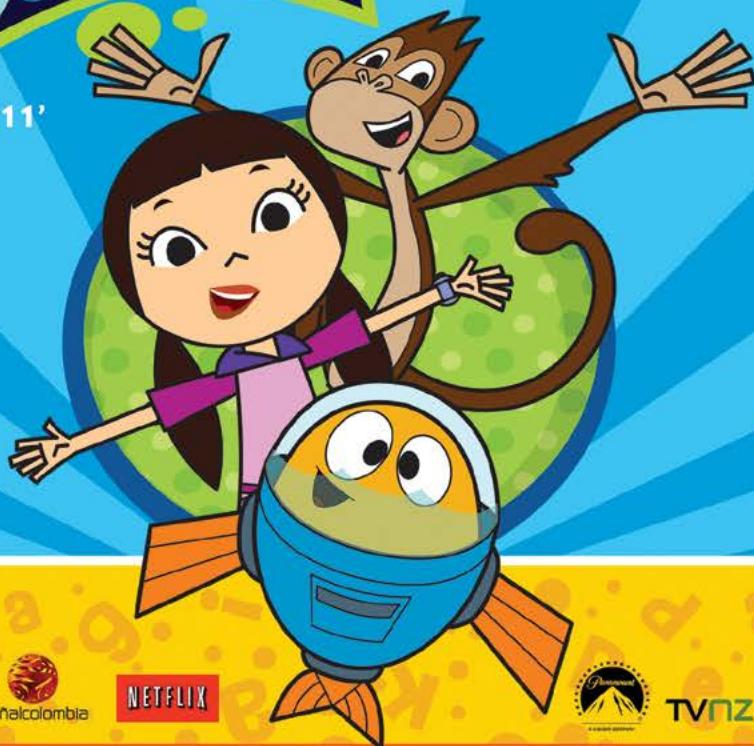
**Looney Tunes Spotlight Collection Vol. 8** [May 13, \$19.98]

**Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron**  
Blu-ray [May 13, \$14.99]



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